A REASONABLE FAITH FOR A PLAIN MAN

L. B. ASHBY

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A

REASONABLE FAITH FOR A PLAIN MAN

By
L. B. ASHBY
(RECTOR OF DICKLEBURGH, NORFOLK)

With a Foreword by

THE VEN. THE HON. THE ARCHDEACON
OF S. ALBANS
(Prolocutor of the Lower House of Convocation)

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PREFACE

THE contents of this book appeared originally as Saturday articles in the *Morning Post* during 1928 and the present year, and I am much indebted to the proprietors and to the editor of that journal for permission to republish these articles in book form.

In Chapter One I have tried to explain that the right way to a knowledge of God is to begin with the study of Our Lord, proceeding thus from the Known to the Unknown. Consistently with this statement, I have arranged the chapters in Part I in such an order as to follow out this method, i.e., in the order of the Church's Year. Part II deals briefly with the Scriptures; Part III with Christ's Personality and with some of His teaching, and Part IV with the carrying out of this teaching in daily life.

I want to say "Thank you" for the hundreds of kind letters which I have received, and to say also how really sorry I am that it has been simply impossible, without the help of a secretary, to answer more than a fraction of them.

L. B. A.

Dickleburgh,
1929.

FOREWORD

Good wine needs no bush, and it is not quite obvious why my friend Mr. Ashby wants me to write a foreword to this volume. It may be because he has used one of my best stories in the course of it, or more probably because he desired to make a gesture of friendliness to his old Archdeacon. That the wine is good, is clear from the fact that the editor of the *Morning Post* goes on steadily publishing a sermon by Mr. Ashby every Saturday, and from the fact that before the book has been published between one and two thousand copies of it have been ordered, no doubt by readers of the *Morning Post.*

Very likely a good many of these sermons have been a God-send to some of our overworked clergy and to their congregations. The clergy of the Church of England are expected to preach far too many sermons, and if some of them have mastered these sermons and preached the essence of them in their own words, so much the better for both preacher and people.

For they seem to me to be just the sort of sermons that most of us simple people want to hear. They are devout and Christian and they are clear and direct, and above all each sermon teaches one something and when you have finished it there will be no doubt in your mind as to what it was that Mr. Ashby intended to teach. One great point in these sermons is that the preacher has always got some definite lesson which he desires to teach!

"Go ye therefore and teach all nations," was the commission to the Apostles, and if we remembered more often our duty of teaching, we should preach better sermons. Exhortation three times a week to

the same handful of people is not really useful; dear Bishop King used to warn us against preaching what he called "Be good, Be good, Be good" sermons. People want to know *how* they can be good. We must teach them how Our Lord can help them in time of temptation and how He can lift up the fallen, and set loose those who are tied and bound with the chain of sin. It is not enough to tell them to pray, we must teach them how to pray. It is useless to tell them that they ought to be Communicants, unless we give them simple instruction about the Holy Communion. The ordinary Church of England men and women have received too little of the teaching which Our Lord sent His Church to give. They need it very badly and, what is more, they want it. Only it must be thoughtful and yet simple, it must be in touch with the Unseen and yet not out of touch with our daily life.

That is what we all want and that is why so many hundreds of people have ordered copies of this volume.

KENNETH F. GIBBS.

15*th July*, 1929.

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A Reasonable Faith for a Plain Man

PART I

THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

I.—The Church's Year

On Advent Sunday we begin another Church's year. It was a happy instinct which led the Church to organise her worship in a sequence of seasons, festivals, and fasts which present the great foundation truths of the Christian Faith in an ordered series of what might almost be called living pictures. It is an extraordinarily helpful device, and has manifold great advantages.

To take the least first, it provides a welcome variety in our religious lives, and saves worship from monotony. A year of worship with fifty-two equally spaced-out Sundays might easily become very much like the Great North Road, with a telegraph-pole every so many yards—one dead level of monotonous journeying. But the scheme of the Church's year has the effect of varying the landscape for us and of producing undulations in the road, so that sometimes we are down in a quiet and shaded valley, like Advent, or climbing a stiff gradient under a leaden sky, like Lent. At other times we are up on the rising ground, where the sky above is blue and the glorious sunshine bathes all the prospect in the golden light of Christmas or Easter or Ascension. Epiphany is rather like passing through an old-world village nestling among the trees, and the Trinity season is where we travel easily on a long stretch of level road through a wide countryside of open fields and hedgerows, the scenery around us much of one character, yet pleasant to the eye. No one could truthfully say that the Church's year is dull.

Then, again, it has the enormous advantage of enabling us to keep the proportion of the Faith. Each great foundation truth of the Christian religion is brought in its turn to our notice, and none is overlooked

or omitted. The Incarnation, Our Lord's earthly life, the Atonement, the Resurrection, the Ascension, the Holy Spirit, the Communion of Saints, and so forth, make their appearance each in due order, and are thus recalled to our remembrance. Whenever some odd or eccentric form of Christianity has made its appearance, it has been due to the fact that some one particular truth or aspect of the Christian Faith has been isolated and emphasised at the expense of all the rest. The Church's year at least aims at keeping the right balance of the Faith and gives each truth its due place and proper weight.

Another advantage is this. When all is said and done, the real object of our religion is to enable us to make our lives and characters as much like our Lord's as we can possibly make them. Now it is patent that the Church's year is based on our Lord's incarnate life on earth. We begin with His birth at Christmas (for which Advent is simply a short preparation) ; we follow Him through His boyhood, His Temptation, His Passion, Resurrection, and Ascension, and during the Trinity season we follow His ministry in Galilee and study His words and actions. We get, therefore, what amounts to a series of object-lessons on the life and character of Christ, and are thus helped to follow the blessed steps of that most holy Life from point to point and invited to make Him the model of our own living and dying. The religion of Christians is Christ. Nothing could proclaim that fact more loudly than the scheme of the Church's year, and no one who intelligently and systematically follows its sequence of worship and teaching can very well manage to lose sight of Him for very long.

Moreover, to a very great extent, it helps to keep Him also before the eyes of the man in the street. For those days which (with a change of one letter) we now call " holidays," the Church first made " Holy Days " in her Christian year, and it is only because of this that they are holidays at all. No one, therefore, who on Boxing Day, Easter Monday, or Whit Monday indulges in recreation instead of repairing to work—

not even the thoughtless crowds who (with a singular want of gentlemanly feeling) turn Good Friday into a football orgy—can be wholly and entirely ignorant of the fact that they owe these holidays directly to Christ and indirectly to the Church which made these great days of His redeeming love into her festivals and fasts. So that, however little they may be conscious of the fact, the Church's year still impinges upon the life of the people, and in this way does something but for which Christ would be even more completely forgotten than He is.

Lastly, the Church's year shows that the Church knows where religion begins. A large percentage of Englishmen probably think that religion consists of the Bible and that the beginning of religion is the first Chapter of Genesis. The Church knows better. She knows that the beginning of religion is the First Sunday in Advent, and that if you really want to know anything about God, you must begin with Jesus Christ. So she takes us by the hand and leads us first to Bethlehem, telling us that our study of God must begin there, and that when, passing through Epiphany, Lent, Good Friday, Easter, Ascension, and Whitsun, we have learnt all that we can about Christ, we shall then—and not till then—be in a position to pass on to consider the Being and Nature of God on Trinity Sunday. The Church does not make the mistake of beginning by arguing about God. She begins by telling you about Jesus Christ. This is, of course, the right order: she goes from the known to the unknown. As a matter of fact, we do not and cannot know anything whatever about God at all, apart from Bethlehem and Calvary. We do not know that He is Love or Goodness, that He is our Father in Heaven, or that He cares about us at all, except for what we see in Jesus Christ; and not until we have first given our answer to the question, "What think ye of Christ?" are we in any position at all to say what it is that we can believe about God. "No man hath seen God at any time," but we have seen Jesus, and that is why we must begin at Bethlehem.

II—The Foundation-Stone

It is well to remind ourselves of what is the real foundation on which Christianity stands. A thoughtful Christian, if asked to give a reason for the hope that is in him, would answer that his faith rests neither on the alleged fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy nor on miracles, but on a certain impression made upon his mind by the personality and character of Christ as portrayed in the Gospels. This impression is not a thing which can be argued about; it can only be felt; and for that reason it is not altogether easy to define and explain.

The Gospels are writings which are absolutely unique in the whole range of the world's literature. They have no parallel. Nothing even faintly resembling them exists elsewhere; and the character which is delineated in their pages is also unique. It is a character which stands absolutely alone, and to which there is no comparison. The peculiar quality which it possesses is perhaps best realised when we remember that no painting of Christ has ever been made which we could for one moment look at feeling that it suggested adequately what we feel that it ought to suggest.

Regarded simply as a literary phenomenon, the mere existence of this portrait drawn in the Gospels constitutes a problem of the first magnitude, if it is assumed to have been created by the unaided imagination of the Evangelists. For it combines qualities never before or since united in a single character, and which, if we had not the actual description of such a character set before us in the Gospels, to point to, we should unhesitatingly declare to be altogether incompatible.

The Person there described is One Who is entirely simple and natural, homely, friendly, and companionable, who wears the dress of a Galilean peasant and lives as such; an altogether human Person, gentle, tender, and very lovable; utterly devoid of any faintest

trace of pretentiousness or grandeur, and Who yet leaves upon the mind an impression of a majesty which is overawing, of a dignity and greatness which are superhuman, Who has about Him an indefinable quality which one can only describe as unearthly, "Whose being" (to quote Canon Streeter) "is rooted in the immensities."

Here is Someone Whom you can at one moment invite into your house to share your supper with you, and at the next moment find yourself kneeling at His feet; Someone Who is at once a simple human friend, and yet somehow removed from you by a distance which makes Him high above you as Heaven is above the earth.

In the most artless and almost unconscious way the Gospels convey the fact that those who came into contact with Him received an impression of an unearthly dignity shining through an utterly homely exterior which made such an unlikely person as the Roman Centurion feel that he was unworthy to receive Him into his house, and which made even an overbearing and naturally contemptuous Pilate feel that there was something about the Prisoner standing before him which he could not quite fathom; a something which made him "marvel" and quite evidently shook his confidence in himself.

The familiar story of Charles Lamb and his friends conveys, perhaps better than anything else, the impression which this figure depicted in the Gospels leaves on the mind. "You see," he said, "if Shakespeare entered this room where we are sitting, we should all stand up; but if Christ came in, we should all kneel down."

It is this unparalleled combination of what we usually regard as mutually exclusive qualities which is so utterly baffling. It is the combination of a child-like humility with the assertion of claims so stupendous that no human being could make them for himself without being considered either insane or else suffering from an overweening conceit. "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away."

" He that loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me."

There is a tacit assumption of sinlessness which, if put forward by anyone else, would at once be regarded as mere hypocrisy, combined with a simple sincerity and singleness of mind which is patent and obvious ; a claim to an intimate and personal knowledge of and fellowship with God such as the greatest of the Saints would shrink from making, combined with a natural and undisguised pleasure in human conviviality which enabled His enemies to call Him " a gluttonous man and a wine-bibber."

These are just a few of the many contrasts united in the character of Christ ; and the extraordinary thing about this fact is that the result is a complete and harmonious unity in which any sense of discrepancy is totally absent. This unity is, in fact, the chief wonder of the Gospel story, and if the portrait was not drawn from life, we are left to explain how this strange blending of apparently opposite characteristics was achieved.

If there were men capable of evolving from their imaginations a character which is at once human and divine, and which yet never fails for a moment to impress us with the sense that it is entirely real and natural, being, like the vesture which He is recorded to have worn, " without seam, woven from the top throughout," all of one piece, a perfect harmony, then these men constitute a miracle themselves. The creative imagination of a Shakespeare is a feeble thing compared with the literary genius and art of these writers of the Gospel, who possessed the skill to draw without a flaw the portrait of a character so incredibly difficult to handle.

The most simple and natural thing to assume is that the portrait was drawn from life ; for the conviction forces itself upon us that is too wonderful to have been invented and too far removed from human experience to have been otherwise than divine. This is what even Napoleon felt about this portrait when,

shutting up the New Testament, he said of Christ, "Do you know that I am an understander of men? Well, He was no man!"

III.—The Apostles' Creed

Creeds, nowadays, are not very much in favour. There is a notion abroad that they belong to the outworn apparatus of religion and should be "scrapped." We are told that "it does not matter what you believe as long as you do what is right."

Further, there is an idea in people's minds that creeds have become barriers which separate Christian people from each other and which are an obstacle to reunion. "They should therefore be obtruded as little as possible." In any case, it is said, if they are to be retained at all, the proper place for them is in a manual of instruction and not in a service as an act of worship. "Recited in church," says a writer, "they are calculated to give the maximum of offence to those whose convictions they do not accurately express, whilst they produce the minimum of devotional effect."

Now, if all this is really true, it is worth asking with what amount of justification or even of profit to ourselves we can stand upon our feet in church and recite the Apostles' Creed? Does it serve any useful purpose? Is it appropriate as an act of worship, or is it something which were better not done at all?

We must begin by asking what the Apostles' Creed is? Its very name gives the answer. It is just a brief summary of those things which formed the message about God proclaimed to men by Christ's Apostles. "That which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled of the Word of Life declare we unto you, that ye may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ. This is the message which we have heard of Him."

We have only to open our New Testament to see what this " message " was. It was " that God is light and love, and in Him is no darkness at all " ; that what God is like can be seen in Jesus Christ, Who suffered and died for love of men, and that through His Spirit shed abroad in their hearts men may begin to walk in newness of life in fellowship with Jesus.

This is the " Word of Life " which they declare, and it is summarised in the Apostles' Creed, which is simply the New Testament in a nutshell—the briefest possible statement of those foundation truths which became the basis of a new kind of life which many men and women began to live shortly after the Crucifixion.

Now, when, being gathered together in church, we stand up and as one man confess that these are " the things which are most surely believed among us," we are not, of course, reciting a barren and meaningless " abridged statement of doctrine," much less are we in any self-assured spirit asserting our orthodoxy as against other people (which were a senseless thing to do), but we are with quite humble thankfulness reminding ourselves of that solid rock for our feet which we have found amid the quicksands of speculative thought, and recalling to our minds those great foundation-stones upon which a Christian life is built.

A life is in a true sense a building, and every building must have a foundation of some kind. You cannot build a life, or anything else, upon nothing. It is a great thing to be able (and especially nowadays) to say " I believe," and happy is the man who can say it. He has at least something on which to stand foursquare against the storms of life, and that is something to thank God for.

And so, rightly regarded, this recitation of our faith is one of the most natural and happiest acts of worship, and is calculated, as Mr. Clough says somewhere, " to fortify a man's soul." If it does that, it is anything but useless.

But, further, these great yet simple truths of the Creed are not merely the foundation-stones of our own

lives, but they constitute also " the articles of association " of the Church. The Church is a Society which has a *raison d'être*, a purpose and a mission. That mission is to hand on to others and to proclaim to all men this faith about God, which has come through Jesus Christ. Her commission is " to go into all the world and preach this ' good news ' (Gospel) to every creature."

Nothing, therefore, could well be more appropriate than that when " we are assembled and met together " on the first day of the week, we should deliberately call to remembrance the message which has been entrusted to our keeping and which it is our duty to preserve and hand on through the ages.

To recite the Creed is to say both to ourselves and to the world, " These are the things for which we stand ; this is the faith delivered to us as a trust, and we are witnesses of these things." This is again by no means a profitless thing to do.

Lastly, to say the Creed is a very real act of worship. We read recently in our papers an account of a review of the Fascisti held by Mussolini. Drawn up before him, they raised every man his right hand stretched out Fascisti-fashion towards the Duce, proclaiming to him thus the honour in which they held him and their unswerving allegiance to him as their leader and captain. It must have been an impressive, not to say a moving, spectacle.

Is it not true to say that the recitation of the Creed is something very like this ? Are we not spiritually raising, as it were, our right hands to God to assure Him of our whole-hearted trust in Him and of our unalterable allegiance ? " Worship " means the expressing of the *worth* or *worthiness* of God. What act of worship could possibly be more complete than to tell Him that we put our whole trust in Him through Jesus Christ and to reaffirm our allegiance to him ? To say to anyone " I believe in you utterly " is perhaps the highest honour that we can pay to one of our fellowmen. Is it less than this when it is said to God ? Really it is a question whether this offering of our

faith to God is not the greatest act of worship in the whole service, and our "Firmly I believe and truly" an anthem of praise like no other than could be raised to Him.

IV.—Bethlehem

The Prayer Book of 1549 had two collects for Christmas Day, one for the first Communion and one for the second. The first one disappeared from the Prayer Book in 1552. It was a great loss, for it is a singularly beautiful collect. Here it is: "God whiche makest us glad with the yerely remembraunce of the birth of thy onely sonne Jesus Christ; graunt that as we joyfully receive him for our redemer, so we may with sure confidence beholde hym when he shall come to be our judge, who liveth and reigneth, etc."

There can be no question that God still maketh us glad with the yearly remembrance of the birth of His only Son, Jesus Christ. The one thing which shows no sign whatever of diminishing, but rather the reverse, is this abounding gladness at Christmastide in the hearts of all men. Still on Christmas Day half the world pauses from work and business to turn its eyes towards a manger at Bethlehem and a little Child who is there. We can, if we choose, assert that Christmas "keeps up" because it is an old custom and people enjoy this bright festival and holiday which comes so opportunely to cheer the gloom of the darkest period of the year. But all the same, that will not be anything like the whole truth.

There is much more in it than that. That does not account for why there is an overflowing kindliness in people's hearts which is not there in such large measure at ordinary times; why a quite unusual amount of sympathy goes out to the needy and the lonely; why poor relations are remembered; why everyone is thinking about making the children happy; why there is so much good-will towards men. Nor does it explain why Jones, who never goes to church, announces that

he must go to church this morning "because it's Christmas Day, you know," and—what is more—actually goes.

No! Let us own up. That little Child in His Manger has got a terrible lot to do with it all. We may imagine that He has lost His hold over us, but that is just what He has not done. Somewhere in the secret places of our hearts *He* has a place. Easy enough to tell ourselves that the Bethlehem story is a legend and not really true, but all the while we know quite well that we do not for one moment intend to give it up. We love it too much. It is the finest story in the world, and the sweetest and the most touching. Somehow it *does* make us glad with a gladness which is quite different from any other sort of gladness which we ever know, a gladness which somehow seems to come from God—"*God* whiche makest us glad."

So we cannot afford to give it up, and that is why we do not mean to do so. How infinitely poorer the world would be without it! It is a strange story, maybe, and hard for our intellects to accept; but then there are more ways than one, are there not, in which a thing may be true? A thing may be true spiritually as well as intellectually; and if this story of Bethlehem has sweetened and blessed all human life and brought gladness into an otherwise sorrowful world, is it not true with a truth of its own? Is it not also a fact which there is no denying that we ourselves have been better and happier men and women just in proportion as we have believed and welcomed its message into our hearts, accepting it as the good news of God?

This story, you see, is addressed to our *hearts*, and our hearts are the best part of us. It is through our hearts that we are made good, and God knows that fact better than anybody. It is by love and not by argument that our wills are moved, and here at Bethlehem God is approaching us by the road of love to see what that will do. We can, of course, brush aside God's Christmas story if we choose, but we shall be the losers if we do. In the end it *is* true, is it not, that we know of no one else in all the world who can be

our Redeemer (that is, who can save us from ourselves) save this little Child ? Can either science or philosophy make us into good men and women ?

But how many thousands of lives has this Christmas story changed ? That fact alone ought to set us asking whether, after all, this is not a thing which does come from God. Can we really conceive of any merely human imagination in which this story, so sweet and simple, so altogether lovely, so original and so unlikely, can have originated ? Some of us cannot help believing that it must be God's story—all His very own. We cannot think of anyone except God Who would have thought of telling the man who is a millionaire that, if he wishes to be saved (that is, to be made a really good man), he must go and kneel down beside the manger of a little Child in Bethlehem.

But that is just the sort of thing that God would tell us. Nor can we possibly help seeing that the further off we are from the Child of Bethlehem and all that He stands for, the more completely are we in the wrong, because, so manifestly, He is in the right. And that is why the old collect ends by saying that it is this little Child Who will be our Judge. Of course He will, because in the end we are bound to be measured against *Him*, and God will accept us just in so far as we are trying to make ourselves as much like Him as we can, and must reject us just in so far as we are rejecting Him in His poverty, His humility, and His love, and are going our own way.

V—Epiphany

In the realm of history, King Arthur and his knights are at best shadowy and uncertain figures. Neither they themselves nor their exploits have any sure historical basis. All the same, no one could very well read the Arthurian legends without learning a very great deal about spiritual things, such as chivalry, honour, courage and loyalty. Truth—and very great and vital truth—can be " embodied in a tale," and we

have only to think of Our Lord's parables to realise that stories are some of the most effective of all vehicles for bringing truth home to our hearts and minds.

The historicity of the Wise Men can, of course, neither be proved nor disproved. In any case, it does not matter. Whether they belong to the realm of poetry and legend rather than to the realm of history is immaterial. If you prefer to think of it as just a beautiful old story, well and good; only, remember that a story may enshrine very valuable spiritual truth; and if we approach this story intelligently, we shall do so as those who are not going to bother much about what sort of casket it is which holds the jewel, as long as they can get a glimpse of the jewel itself which lies inside. Approached in this way, it is seen to be both a prophecy and a parable.

And first, it is a prophecy, and, what is more, a prophecy which is actually being fulfilled before our eyes to-day. These sages, journeying from Eastern lands to seek out the Christ in Bethlehem and offering at His cradle their worship and their gifts, represent plainly enough the East with its ancient philosophies and immemorial religions turning its face to Christ and coming to lay its treasures at His feet. This is precisely what is happening at the present time. If neither India, China, nor Japan have as yet become Christian nations, yet in all these lands educated men are more and more turning their eyes towards Jesus Christ with ever-deepening interest.

The New Testament is being earnestly read and studied in the East to an extent which few people realise, and Our Lord's character and teaching are beginning to be accepted almost unconsciously as the ideal standard of conduct. Many educated Hindus to-day will speak quite naturally of an action as being "Christ-like," though they have not themselves become Christians.* The old religions are maintained and will no doubt hold their ground for many a long day, but they are ceasing to meet the spiritual needs

* Read *The Christ of the Indian Road*, a great book by E. Stanley Jones, reprinted 13 times. Hodder and Stoughton.

of those who are really seeking after God. These ancient cults have no good news of God to offer, and, further, the best minds in the East are beginning to admit the hopeless deficiency of their moral teaching in the light of the standard set up by the New Testament.

Even amongst well-educated Jews there is to-day a movement towards the serious study of Christ's teaching. That is a very significant fact. The face of the East is turning, however slowly, towards Bethlehem and its Star. It seems almost certain that, as the world becomes unified, as it is rapidly doing, it will ultimately have one universal religion. Can this religion possibly be any other than the religion of Christ? Can anyone even faintly imagine the world as a whole becoming either Buddhist or Hindu or Mohammedan? But one can easily conceive of its becoming Christian, not only because the Christian standard of life is the highest that there is, but because Christianity is the only religion which is really international and transcends all boundaries of climate and colour. Its outlook is neither merely Eastern nor Western, because Christ is neither an Eastern nor a Western, but is Himself international. He was made *man*, and not *a* man, and in consequence He is as much at home in China as in England.

It is needless to point out what priceless spiritual gifts the ancient East will bring as its offering to Him when at last it reaches Bethlehem.

And for ourselves this old-world story is a parable about our own search after God. If we want to find Him we must begin by finding Christ, for no one will ever find Him in any other way than that which the Wise Men took. People, we are told, are seeking after God at this present time, but they are seeking Him everywhere except in the one place where He is to be found. They are dabbling in Spiritualism, Theosophy, New Thought, and rigmaroles about the Pyramids—all of them roads which lead nowhere. Meanwhile He is at Bethlehem. As a matter of fact, He does not need finding, because He has been found. He has been found

in Christ. "If the finest spirits of the human race," says Stanley Jones, "should sit down and think out the kind of God whom they would like to see in the Universe, His moral and spiritual likeness would gradually form like unto the Son of Man. The greatest news that has ever been broken to the human race is that God is like Christ."

You can meet people to-day who tell you that they can believe in Christ, but cannot believe in God. It is an oddly false antithesis. Jesus does not rival or push out God. The more you know of Him the more you know of God. This is an actual fact of experience made by millions, that in coming to know Christ they have come to know God. It is a matter of simple *testimony* and not of argument. We can think of nothing higher for God than that He should be like Jesus in His character. If that is not good enough for us then it is impossible to imagine what we really want. If people find that they can give their hearts to Christ, has it never struck them that God cannot possibly be less good than He is? Has it never struck them either that you cannot divorce the lovely character of Jesus from His fellowship of heart and mind and will with God, of Whom He is never tired of speaking? How can we accept Christ and at the same time reject His witness to and testimony about God? That is simply not logic.

You cannot separate Jesus and God. They belong together. Jesus is The Star at Bethlehem, whose human life shines with the light of God at the heart of it. Go and find Him, and presently you will discover that you have found God.

> "The world is weary of new tracts of thought
> That lead to nought.
> Yet still above them all one Figure stands
> With outstretched hands."

VI.—Nazareth

It is disappointing that we know so little about Our Lord's early years at Nazareth. We should so much

have liked to know more about the gradual development of His character and about the steps by which He presently came to be the Jesus whom we know and love. For, of course, He *did* develop just as other people do. We make one of the greatest possible mistakes if we suppose that He came into the world with a character ready-made. His life would not have been a real and genuine human life if that had been so. He would not have been made "in all points like as we are," and that would have meant that His human life could never have been a real standard for our human lives.

To know that His character had to be formed and moulded, just as our characters have to be, helps us when we are trying to make ourselves like Him. He did not have any unfair advantage over us. The Gospels are quite simply and naturally frank about this. They make no attempt to ascribe a miraculous childhood to Him. The silly miracles attributed to Him in the false gospels at once proclaim the spurious character of these documents, and at the same time strengthen our trust in the simple, unaffected truth of the genuine Gospels, which tell us with perfect naturalness that "Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favour with God and man," *i.e.*, that He gradually developed, mentally, bodily and spiritually.

To know more of the story of those early years would have been of the deepest interest, because "the child is father of the man"; but where so little is told us, much can be gleaned with a very great degree of certainty from Our Lord's parables. In his book, *The Jesus of History*, Mr. Glover has given us from this source an intensely interesting reconstruction of the circumstances and conditions in which Our Lord grew up at Nazareth.

Nazareth was an inconsiderable village lying among the hills of Southern Galilee. The home where Jesus lived was almost certainly a square whitewashed cottage with a flat roof, the carpenter's shop being a lean-to building along one side of it. The floor was of earth, upon which "the grass of the field," after first being

" cast into the oven " to be dried, was strewn for a covering. S. Joseph disappears from the Gospels after the visit to Jerusalem, when Jesus was twelve years old. We may safely conclude that he was dead. Mary was therefore a widow, left with five boys and two, or possibly more, girls. There was a family of seven children to provide for.

One answer to the question why Jesus stayed quietly in Nazareth for thirty years is because it was there that " the duty which was nearest " lay. He had a widowed mother and six young brothers and sisters to support, and He could not leave them until some of the younger boys grew big enough to become the bread-winners in His place, and to keep the home together. The parables suggest that it was a very poor home. Patches were sewn on old garments till they could be patched no longer (Mark ii. 21). If one small coin was lost, all the house-floor was cleared of grass and every corner swept out until the precious coin was found (Luke xv. 8). The staple food was bread, with fish from the lake, and sometimes an egg ! (Luke xi.). He mentions the price of the cheapest flesh-food used by peasants : sparrows—two for a farthing.

And in this decidedly poor home there were other duties to be done besides bread-winning. There were all those brothers and sisters—noisy no doubt, as children will be, and sometimes quarrelling and troublesome—and there was a tired mother who found them too much for her at times. We can picture Jesus coming to the rescue, taking them off her hands, settling their quarrels, keeping them quiet with some of His wonderful stories. No one could tell such stories as He could, and they showed you, too, what were the kind of things you ought to do and what things not to do ! So there was plenty to do, to be sure, in the home at Nazareth ; plenty of hard, honest toil at carpentering, plenty of home duties, plenty of patience to exercise in so large a family, plenty of self-denial with so many mouths to feed, plenty of love needed, plenty of service to be rendered.

Well, that was the sphere where the world's loveliest and strongest character was formed; the sphere of a poor home and a large family with abundance of hard work. That was the training-ground chosen for Him Whom we call the Son of God. Knowing what it was that He was born to be, would *we* have chosen such a training-ground for Him? Should not we have chosen something very different for One called to so great a destiny: access to the best teachers, a career amongst the affairs of men, contact with the great world, a larger, wider sphere altogether?

But God thought otherwise; and as for Jesus Himself—growing, beyond any shadow of a doubt, more clearly conscious day by day of Who He was and of what He had come to do for the world—He never made through thirty years any attempt to seek a larger sphere, but accepted the place where God had appointed His lot and asked for nothing better. And here it was that as a matter of fact He gained just all those things which made Him what He was in His human life, and because of which we cannot help but love Him; His sympathy with the poor; His tender reverence for women; His understanding of others; His love for children; His patience; His courageous endurance; His simplicity of heart. Poverty, home-life and home-duties, hard, honest toil—what a school of character is here! Anyhow, it was the school chosen for the world's Saviour.

VII.—The Temptation (I)

Scarcely two hours from the gates of Jerusalem a waterless waste of crumbling limestone and scattered shingle begins to fall away towards the chasm of the Dead Sea. Stunted bushes, thorns, and an occasional tuft of broom is all the vegetation which relieves the yellow bareness of this desolate tract. It is a dry and thirsty land. In the Old Testament this waste is called "Jeshimon," which means "devastation," an apt name for it. To-day it is known as "The Arabah."

In our Authorised Version it is called " the wilderness," or " the desert." It covers some thirty-five miles by fifteen. Standing here and looking out across the Dead Sea, you can see the Mountains of Moab standing sentinel on the far horizon.

Here it was that Our Lord, before He began His work, went apart to be alone with God, to pray and to think out the principles upon which His great task was to be carried out. In doing this He did what many other great souls and religious leaders have done. Buddha, Mahomet and St. Paul all withdrew themselves from the haunts of men and shut themselves away in solitude for a season before putting their hands to the plough.

It is obvious that the account of what passed in Our Lord's soul during these days in the wilderness can have come only from Himself ; for no one else knew, nor could have known. At some time or other during His Ministry He must have told His disciples about it, and this account of His spiritual experiences which He gave to them forms the only instance in which He broke through His reticence as to His own inward life. For that reason the narrative is of the utmost interest.

Remembering that He was the world's most skilful Teacher, we shall not be surprised to find that in relating His experiences to His disciples, who were men with simple and almost childlike minds, He threw the story of His spiritual conflict into a concrete and graphic form in order to help them to grasp it better. An abstract account of His mental emotions and of the thoughts which passed through His mind would have conveyed but little to His simple-minded hearers. The parable, which presents abstract ideas in a concrete form, is the favourite vehicle with Orientals for conveying moral lessons. Every Eastern understands a parable.

It is important to grasp this fact. We should be quite mistaken if we imagined that Jesus believed for one instant that " Satan " appeared to Him in any bodily form ; spoke to Him in an audible voice, or actually carried Him up on to a pinnacle of the Temple

or to the summit of a high mountain. Except in dreams or in our imagination this sort of thing does not happen to us, and it did not happen to Our Lord, who "was in all points tempted like as we are"; which means, if it means anything, that His experience of temptation was precisely the same as our experience is. The only form in which we know temptation, when we are by ourselves, is that of suggestions presented to our minds or of mental pictures which take shape in our imaginations. We see no bodily shape; no audible voice speaks to us. It was not, of course, otherwise in the case of Jesus. He saw Himself in imagination standing on a pinnacle or on a mountain-top—one of those great mountain-tops of Moab which He could see out yonder across the Dead Sea. The incident of the stones which might be made bread was a thought, a suggestion, which came into His mind; but, in describing these inner spiritual experiences to His disciples, He threw them into a concrete and dramatic form in order to enable them to visualise them.

People who have been taught as children that Our Lord's Temptation was a series of objective happenings often stumble at this narrative, because, as they say, "This is not the manner and method by which temptation comes to *them*." They therefore think of it as something which has no real bearing on their own lives and on their own difficulties. This is a great pity, because, rightly understood, the story of Christ's Temptation is simply full of meaning for all of us. Parents would be well advised to teach their children from the first that what is here described are *inward* experiences which took place in Our Lord's Soul, and mind and imagination, and that the power of evil is an unseen spiritual force by means of which evil thoughts and imaginations come to us.

Children should not be shown crude pictures of the Temptation, depicting Our Lord conversing with a winged and horned Being of uninviting aspect. If we wish to show them a picture of the Temptation, we should show them the picture by W. Dyce, where

nothing but the solitary figure of Our Lord is seen, seated on a stone, with intense thought and conflict written on His face, suggesting inward struggle.*

Nor is there any reason for supposing that Our Lord believed "Satan" to be a personal individual. His hearers did believe this, but that is not to say that He believed it. It was obviously easier to make His disciples understand what he wanted them to understand if He made use of their own modes of thought and employed the language which they would best understand. His teaching does show a clear conviction of the existence of real forces of evil which surround men, but we do dishonour to the greatness of His mind and to the quality of His spiritual insight if we suppose Him to be capable of holding any kind of belief which could be described as crude.

We will try to show how, if they are rightly understood, each of the Three Temptations which are recorded as having assailed Our Lord are really temptations to do precisely the same kind of things which we ourselves are tempted to do, and that it is an entire mistake to suppose that "they are not the sort of things which happen to us."

VIII.—The Temptation (II).

It is easy to understand people saying that the story of Christ's temptations does not help them very much in their own personal lives because His temptations were quite unlike those which come to most of us. *We* are not tempted to turn stones into bread (and could not if we would); nor are we tempted to throw ourselves down from lofty buildings, nor is anyone ever likely to offer us all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them. What, then, have these temptations got to do with the daily life of the ordinary plain man? The answer is that, properly understood,

* This picture will be found in the frontispiece to Sanday's *Life of Christ in Recent Research* (Oxford University Press).

they are really temptations of precisely the same kind as we have to face almost daily. The key to the right understanding of them lies in realising that it was during these days in the wilderness that Our Lord faced and settled the great question of the principles upon which His work was to be done. What were the conditions upon which alone He could really save men out of their sins ?

And first, of course, arose the question of the personal cost to Himself. The real meaning of the word " temptation " is " trial " or " testing." There can scarcely be any question that one reason why He entered voluntarily upon this prolonged self-discipline was to test His human powers of endurance. It was what, in speaking of a ship, we call a " trial run." He was under no delusions as to what would be required of anyone who was going to carry out unflinchingly the whole will of God ; and He saw that no one who was for one moment going to think first about his own needs or ease or comfort, or who was going to compromise at all in this matter, could possibly be of any real use to God.

The service of God is a hard service, and he who would build God's kingdom amongst men must be prepared to endure hardship. The complete will of God could be done only by One who was prepared to endure far worse things than hunger, and if, the first time that He felt hungry or faint, He was immediately going to make things comfortable for Himself, how would He stand in the day of Calvary, when it came to *that*, as He foresaw that it would ? The question which we are so fond of asking ourselves : " What's the harm ? " arose in His mind too. Why go hungry when He need not, and nobody any the worse off for His taking a little food ? To which the answer was : " That man doth not live by bread alone." Bread is bought too dearly when it is bought at the expense of duty and principle, and woe to him who barters " the word which proceedeth out of the mouth of God " for bread !

It is surely quite easy to see how this first temptation fits our own case. We want an easy religion. We are prepared to serve God just so far as it is perfectly convenient for us to do so, but not if it is going to cost too much or become too difficult. We want to make our religion fit our lives instead of making our lives fit our religion. We compromise; we try to make the best of both worlds.

When we find that really doing the will of God is going to mean the sacrifice of ease or pleasure, or when we see that it will result in our being poorer in pocket—what then? "Business is business." "I must make a living; I must have bread. One cannot be expected to carry one's religious principles to the absurd length where they begin to interfere with business methods. It is asking too much. It can't be done." The conflict in Christ's soul was between His duty to God and His personal interests. Would the world ever have heard anything more of Him if He had decided otherwise than He did?

And next came the question: "How was He to exercise the wonderful endowment of which He was conscious?" He had just settled the point as to whether these great powers entrusted to Him were to be used for His own benefit or to meet His own needs. And He had decided clearly that He was to deliver mankind as the Son of Man. He was to work as man, suffer as man, that suffering men might always look to Him, saying: "He was one of us." And how could this be if His lot was so unlike theirs that He met His wants by a word of command directly they arose?

But now came the more difficult question as to whether these powers might not be legitimately and rightly used as a means of drawing men to Himself, and so, through Him, to God. Might they not be used for the hastening of God's kingdom? If so, how far and in what way? He had come in a superstitious age and was in the midst of a people credulous to the last degree. It needed only some overwhelming public miracle, such as descending heaven-borne and

unharmed from the topmost tower of the Temple into the midst of priests and people, to be instantly accepted as the Messiah.

The temptation presented itself thus: "You wish men to believe in you as the Christ of God. Leave them no room for doubt. They are looking for a sign from Heaven: give them the sign that they want. There is a tradition that the Messiah shall appear on the Temple summit. Take advantage of their superstitious beliefs to pave the way to their acceptance of you, and you will be really serving the purposes of God and bringing in His kingdom more quickly than by the laborious and disappointing method of trying to win them one by one by the unaided beauty and truth of your message which all but a few will most certainly reject."

And here is our old friend the temptation "to do evil that good may come"; to say that "the end justifies the means"; to take the line of least resistance rather than face moral and spiritual effort. Because it *did* mean doing evil, to pander to what is weakest and most unworthy in men's characters and to encourage in them what is harmful to their souls. A belief in Himself based on mere superstitious credulity would not be merely a valueless belief, but positively pernicious to the souls of those who followed Him for no better reason than that. It was a quick and easy road to win followers—the line of least resistance; but it meant that men would be made worse and not better; led further away from God instead of nearer to Him. That way of doing things was not God's will, and never could be, for it was the way of *moral cowardice*, plausible, but essentially wrong.

IX.—The Temptation (iii)

Our Lord had decided, firstly, that in hunger, poverty and suffering, not counting the cost, He must preach the Kingdom of God, if He was to preach it in God's way. "They that wear soft raiment are in kings'

houses." It is not such as these who save men out of their sins and bring them home to God. Secondly, He had rejected the temptation to make use of men's superstition and credulity as an easy method of leading them to accept Him as the Christ of God. He saw that the Kingdom of God cannot be built like that. The line of least resistance is practically never the line of the will of God, and never must we do evil that good may come. Consistently with this resolve He did His miracles of healing as unobtrusively as possible, strictly forbidding people to talk about them for fear lest men should be led to follow Him for any reason less than the highest.

They must come to Him, if they came at all, because they saw in the unpretentious Jesus of Nazareth the Way, the Truth and the Life, and not because He was a miraculous Messiah whose credentials were signs and wonders. For this reason He steadfastly refused to show a sign to those who repeatedly demanded one of Him ; for the only faith which is of any use is the faith of love, which makes men turn from their sins. A faith which rests on magic is valueless.

But there remained a third danger, which He could foresee—a net spread for His feet. Just as the Messiah of men's hopes and dreams was to be a wonder-worker, so was he also to be a national hero, who, putting himself at the head of a national rising, and armed with the powers of the Lord of Hosts, should drive the accursed Romans from Palestine and deliver God's people from their age-long oppression. The throne of David should be set up again in Jerusalem and the Jews would see themselves at last a free people once more, under their own King, with all heathen and apostates trodden under their feet. It was this idea which accounts for the shouts of " Hosanna " on Palm Sunday, and it was the complete disappointment of these hopes which changed those shouts into the embittered and contemptuous cry of " Crucify Him ! " on Good Friday. This also lay behind the irony of Pilate's ribald superscription fastened to the Cross : " This is the King of the Jews."

Our Lord's third temptation, therefore, was the temptation to fall in with these popular expectations; to tell men, not the truth of God, but what they wanted to hear, and to make Himself, as He could so easily have done, a national leader and a popular hero. The days were coming when the people of Galilee would be thronging round Him in gigantic crowds—days when repeatedly they would try to take Him by force to make Him a king.

Here again was an easier road to take than the road to Calvary. Why not let Himself be carried along to the accomplishment of His ends by the popular breeze, relying on his unique gifts of personality and His unlimited courage which made it only too easy for Him to become the national idol, and then, having first in this way secured His dominion over men's minds, start to build the Kingdom of God in their hearts?

"All this power will I give Thee if . . . !" If what? If he would sacrifice principle to expediency; if He would sell the truth, suppress His real message and, instead of speaking to men about their sins and the need of repentance, would flatter them and encourage them in their most worldly and materialistic desires—if, in a word, He would sell His own soul and, by so doing, help men to lose their souls also. It would be "roses, roses all the way," but it would be the devil's kingdom that He would build and not *God's* kingdom—a kingdom built on materialism, on power, on ambition and on time-serving; not a kingdom built on goodness and on love.

This is the temptation of the two crowns; the crown of popularity and the Crown of Thorns; the temptation of the two ways, the way of expediency and the way of Sorrows; the temptation of the two hill-tops; the hill of barren success and Calvary, the hill of triumphant failure; the temptation of the two days, Palm Sunday and Good Friday!

It is easy enough to see how in this temptation of Our Lord one of our own commonest and greatest temptations meets us. It is an easy and pleasant thing to be popular, to be in the swim, carried along

by the prevailing ideas and the prevailing fashion, doing "what everyone does"—adapting ourselves weakly to a code of morals which really denies every Christian standard, and which in the name of a fatuous thing called "self-expression" claims the right to express an unrestrainedly selfish self. It is an easy and agreeable path to tread, leading to the prize of what is known as "social success." But it is not along that path that human life is going to be lifted nearer to God. That is done only by those who believe in something called the Will of God, which leads along a very different path, where the going is rough and where you have to walk alone.

Between these two paths we all have to choose. We can choose a success which is really the completest failure, turning to ashes in our hand even as we grasp it, the success that would have been Christ's seated on a golden throne in Jerusalem. How silly and futile that would have been—what an abysmal failure! But on His Cross on Calvary, dying for truth and goodness, loving not Himself but others, and doing the Will of God, He has made Himself the Lord of all good life. "All these things will I give thee." The temptation is a tremendous one; but in the answer which we make to it lies the difference between an existence which is a mere futility and a life which gives us, in our own small measure, some share at least in that great thing which He did for the life of the world.

X.—"The Only Way"

On Passion Sunday we watch Jesus "steadfastly setting His face to go up to Jerusalem" and to Calvary. "And they were in the way, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus went before them, and they were amazed, and as they followed Him they were afraid."

Peter (who told Mark about it afterwards) had never forgotten that day when they had been on the way to Jerusalem. Always he would remember how Jesus, with set face and a far-away look in His eyes,

had gone striding on ahead of them along the road; how he (Peter) and the other disciples had followed some paces behind Him, bunched in a little group, bewildered and frightened, whispering together, feeling that they were moving on to something catastrophic, something dreadful. The look on Jesus's face had told them that; and odd, sinister words which He had let fall; something about "being betrayed, and Chief Priests, and scourging and mocking and—death"!

But at that time, although they were frightened, they had not understood; not the least little bit; so little, that they had argued about who would be the greatest, and the mother of James and John had come running after Him to say that "if He was going up to Jerusalem to take His kingdom and His throne there (and that was surely what He was going for) might her two sons—who had been amongst the first to join up with Him and had never gone back—have the two chief places right and left of Him when that splendid triumph came at Jerusalem with all the world at His feet, as it would be?

And then Jesus had stopped and gazed thoughtfully at all three of them with an odd, whimsical look in His grave deep-set eyes, and had said, "Well, yes—but did they quite understand what they were asking for? Did they at all know what kind of throne He was going to, and what sort of crown He was going to wear and what the places on either side of Him would be like?"

And as He asked them that (Peter realised it all now) He must have been seeing a vision of "a green hill far away" and three crosses, where the places on His right hand and on His left were not His to give, but would be given to them for whom they were prepared! And He had spoken of "a cup to be drunk and a baptism to be baptized with." All very strange and mysterious, but they understood it now. What a pity they had not understood it then!

And we, too, understand it now. We understand how right He was; how clearly He saw what He must do if men were ever to be saved out of their sins

and brought home to God. The only way. There *was* only one way.

Three years ago He had seen Himself in imagination standing on a mountain-top looking out across "all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them" spread out at His feet; a vision of a triumphant popularity, Hosannas, palm branches, and shouting multitudes, a kingdom entered by a rose-strewn path.

But also He had seen the hollowness, the worthlessness, the futility of it all. As if men were won to God and set free from their sins like *that*! And, quite deliberately, He had turned his back on that vision, to face round and look out towards *another* hill-top clouded in darkness, where three crosses stood out gaunt and stark against an angry sky; and He had chosen *that*.

For well He knew that only suffering and sacrifice have redemptive power; that only He who "drinks of the cup" can save His fellow-men. "Father, if it be possible." But it was *not* possible. It never has been, it never will be possible. There *is* no other way. And so He went up to Jerusalem.

And we have to thank Him that He went; thank Him for the clear insight which saw the way to go, for the courage which led His steps unfaltering to Calvary; for the love which loved us unto the end and would not turn back.

For surely we need no one to tell us how impotent, how powerless to save, would have been a Christ who wore a gilded crown and walked in pleasant paths; whereas it is this battered figure, wearing a crown of thorns, covered with dust and blood and sweat, trailing His Cross to Calvary, who has drawn men unto Him.

The whole secret of His power over human hearts lies in the fact that He has a Cross. Without that Cross He would have achieved nothing. He knew what He was doing. Shall we admit that anyhow He has been successful and did not tread the way to Calvary in vain? For He has done what He wanted to do; and Good Friday has never wholly failed to make its appeal even to the most careless.

And He has left us a lesson. Our natural instinct is to avoid suffering and sacrifice. He *chose it deliberately*, when He might so easily have avoided it, because He refused to see suffering merely as a hopeless evil to be simply endured. He saw it as a blessed and redeeming power, like no other in the world—a thing not to *avoid* but to *embrace*, when the call comes.

Certainly the world owes every blessing which has come to it to those who have not been afraid to suffer. How much does it owe to those who have been content to "save their lives" and to "have a good time"? Only sacrifice is fruitful; and sometimes in our best moments His great saying comes back to our minds that "to save your life is really to lose it"—to make nothing of it; but to lose it is to find it, as we can see now that He found His, when He steadfastly set His face to go up to Jerusalem, to Calvary and the Cross.

XI.—The Will of God

In Gethsemane Our Lord is facing up to His death on the morrow. It is going to be a death of shame and degradation, and of ghastly, lingering pain; a death to which He will go alone, forsaken by all His friends. And He is praying, "Not My will, but Thine be done." "Thy will"—the will of God. What then was the will of God for Him!

Probably most people would answer that the will of God for Him was the Cross; but that is not the right answer. The right answer is that God's will for Him was that He should do that which He saw to be His duty, and do it at all costs; and that is not at all the same thing as saying that the will of God was that He should suffer horrible pain and die by inches. It is a distinction of the utmost importance which we must keep clear in our minds.

It is pathetic to see what kind of things people believe to be the will of God. They see the will of God in everything unpleasant or painful which happens

to them : the death of someone they love ; a lingering and painful illness ; a dreadful accident ; a bitter disappointment or a heavy trial. All these things are commonly thought of as being God's will for them, just as it is commonly believed that the horror of the Cross was His will for His dearly-beloved Son. Why have people come to think like this ?

Do they really believe that our Father in heaven spends His time in doling out painful and unpleasant things to His children and in sending them illnesses and calamities ? Does any earthly father (unless he is a criminal degenerate) do this sort of thing to his children ? But if not, why should our Father in heaven (of whom Jesus taught that " He careth for you ") act like this ? How awful it would be if we really had to believe that only the painful and unhappy things which come to us were His will ; and that all the pleasant and happy things were just simply our good luck in which the will of God had no part. That really won't do, will it ? So let us try to get clear about this question.

And the first thing to do is to realise that the will of God, instead of being something done to us, is always the exact opposite. It is something which *we have to do*. " Thy will be done " in the Lord's Prayer means exactly what it says, viz., May God's will be accomplished, carried out. We are not praying that it may be endured, or submitted to, but that it may be *done*. His will for us is that which He wants to see us doing. When Our Lord prayed in Gethsemane, " Thy will be done," He was praying that He might do that which it was the will of God for Him to go and do.

Next we need to realise that it is a mistake to suppose that the will of God is an irresistible necessity about which we have no choice but to submit. That idea is " fatalism," the doctrine of the Mohammedan with his Kismet. Again the exact opposite is the truth. So far from the will of God being something which has got to happen, it is precisely something which we can prevent from happening by refusing to do it. When He made us in His image, He gave *us* a will also, so that we can talk about " My will," and say, " My will be done."

When Our Lord said, " Not My will, but Thine, be done," He knew that, as man, He had a human will of His own, and that He was free to follow which of the two wills He pleased. It was possible for Him *not* to do the will of God, and the agony (which means " conflict ") in Gethsemane was as to which was to be done, " Mine " or " Thine."

And that is the point which we have all got to settle; and getting it settled always will mean an agony or a struggle, because (1) God's will for us is always what is highest, best, bravest, and most unselfish, whereas our will wants to follow the desires of our frail human nature. Even in the case of Our Lord, His human will was *not* to drink of the cup if it were possible. God's will was the harder choice because it was the nobler and greater thing to do. (2) Doing God's will in this world will nearly always mean suffering, loss, and even, sometimes, death.

But these things are the *consequences* of doing His will, and not the will of God itself, which is simply that we should do our duty, be courageous, do right at all costs, and think of others. If doing these things means suffering, then that suffering must be faced; but the doing of our duty, and not the suffering, is what is the will of God for us.

A man believes that it is the will of God that his wife should die of consumption; really the will of God for him is that he should cease living a selfish life. Or again, the will of God for another man is not that his child should be killed by a motor, but that he should pay his debts; not that he should have a serious illness, but that he should provide for his aged parents; not that he should lose his job, but that he should put right that wrong which he did to someone.

The will of God, *as popularly believed in*, is positively the ruin of thousands of people, because they think of it as something done to them which they are called upon to submit to, instead of thinking of it as something hard and difficult and costly, which they ought to get up and do.

The doing of it will often mean for us " sweat as it

were great drops of blood," just as it did in Gethsemane. But when things were at their worst, " there appeared an angel unto Him from heaven, strengthening Him " ; which is the New Testament's way of saying that to those who resolve bravely to do God's will at all costs an unexpected strength will be given to help them to do it ; and all those who have ever gone forth courageously to do that will have found that this is so.

XII.—Christ's Courage

One of the oddest ideas which has ever gained currency is the notion that the character of Christ is very beautiful, but *soft*. It may have been Swinburne, with his " pale Galilean," who set the ball rolling, but Christian art and Christian teaching have much to answer for. Imaginary portraits of Christ in stained-glass windows and elsewhere generally depict an emotionless and sometimes even an almost effeminate figure. Hymns like " Gentle Jesus, meek and mild," have done their bit, and perhaps even St. John's phrase, " The Lamb of God," has not been without its effect in producing in some people's minds the unfortunate and wholly false impression of a Christ who was meek, gentle, and submissive, lacking in virility.

Gentle he certainly was ; gentleness being a prime ingredient of a really great character. We need no more than our word " gentleman " to remind us that roughness and courage have nothing in common. *Really* brave men always are gentle, except when there is simply no choice left them but drastic action. There was one occasion when even Christ saw that no argument except a rope's end was of any avail, and used it with flashing eyes in the Temple, laying about Him and upsetting furniture. There was only one form in which courage could show itself in those circumstances, and He did not hesitate.

It is true that He spoke of Himself as being " meek and lowly of heart," and that He said, " Blessed are

the meek," but "gentle" would be a better translation than "meek" of the Greek word used, and "lowliness" or humility is a virtue so far removed from weakness that only the very strongest characters are really capable of it. It is also true that He told us to "turn the other cheek," which, again, is something which requires the most enormous courage to do.

Taking the Gospel story as it stands, there emerges from it the portrait of an immensely courageous Person whose utter fearlessness stands out in the sharpest possible contrast against the background of the feeble timidity of His disciples and of the essential cowardice of His enemies. With their usual naïve and artless simplicity His disciples show themselves to us as a group of rather frightened men trying to follow a Master who habitually "lived dangerously," and who did not seem to know what fear was. According to them He did not seem to understand how people could be afraid. "Why are ye so fearful?" He asked them after the storm on the lake, when they had been so terrified, and had thrown themselves on that calm courage of His which they took for granted.

He went about telling people never to be afraid. "Fear not," He was always saying. "Fear not them which kill the body." Obviously it is only a Person Who has Himself established a reputation for courage Who can tell other people not to be afraid and can make His followers painfully conscious of their own timidity.

There is no story in the world which is so essentially the story of a brave man as that of the Gospels. Next to an all-embracing love of men, the outstanding feature of the Character which is there portrayed is an unflinching courage. The highest kind of courage which we know is the courage of the man who, having counted the whole cost, deliberately does the very thing which he knows must inevitably bring him to an awful death. If to denounce to their faces the most dangerously powerful and unscrupulously vindictive set of men in Palestine and to make enemies of them was not courage, then we do not know what courage is. He made Calvary certain when He did that; but to Him there

was one thing worse than Calvary, and that was to be guilty of the fear of men; to compromise the truth through cowardice. And He knew well enough what Calvary would mean. Many a time He must have passed drooping figures hanging on wayside crosses where the Romans had nailed them to die an agonising death by inches; and that every nerve in His finely-wrought and sensitive body shrank from the physical horror of it we know from the scene in Gethsemane and the bloody sweat that stood on His brow.

His silence before Pilate has been mistaken for submission. It was, of course, the exact opposite; it was the self-respecting courage of an utterly brave man, who would not stoop to say one word which might induce Pilate, who was wavering and inclined to see justice done, to grant Him His life. His silence before the Jewish Council was the dignified contempt of the most fearless of men for a set of time-serving cowards who were planning to sacrifice Him to save their own skins. They were not worth speaking to.

It was a merciful practice to give to the condemned a draught of wine drugged with myrrh, so as to deaden consciousness. It was offered to Him at Golgotha, but, having tasted it and ascertained its object, "He would not drink." The bravest of the brave might have accepted it without dishonour, but He refused it.

Of a piece with this refusal was that other refusal of the pity of the weeping women. "Weep not for Me," He said to them. Brave men loathe to be pitied, and never more than when they are going to a deliberately self-chosen death on behalf of a great cause for which they have lived and battled and are proud to die.

A variant reading of St. Luke xxiii, 43, records that He said to the Penitent Thief, "Have courage" (θ'αρσει). It is just exactly what He would have said, for it was a favourite word on His lips at all times. His last words were "It is finished," but they were no expiring sigh of relief that His sufferings were over. They were the triumphant shout of a brave man, who has never quailed to the bitter end—τετ'ελεσται—"I have seen it through."

XIII.—"Making Us Sorry"

If Good Friday is to make its appeal to us, we must have some kind of simple idea as to its real meaning. "He was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate." No part of the Christian Faith has suffered more from theological definition or been made more complicated than this plain and moving statement of the Creed. Yet if Calvary be, as we believe, an act of God, it is almost certain to be something entirely simple.

To begin with, it is an undoubted historical fact. Jesus was crucified by the Romans. No competent scholar would deny that to-day. The second plain fact is that He *need not* have been crucified. He was safe in Galilee, where everyone loved him. He had only to keep away from Jerusalem. But He deliberately went there. His death was therefore a voluntary one. He "gave His life"; He "laid it down of Himself," and did so with a definite purpose and intention in His mind. The third fact is that He said His death would prove to be "a ransom for many" and "would draw all men unto Him."

Now round these simple facts theology has woven a tissue of complicated dogma, and there are theories of "The Atonement" still current to-day which are stumbling-blocks in the way of intelligent people. Here are two such theories expressed in two popular hymns:

> For what you have done His blood must atone;
> The Father has *punished* for you His dear Son.
> The Lord in the day of His *anger* did lay
> All our sins on the Lamb, and He bore them away.
>
> Blessed through endless ages be the precious stream
> Which from endless *torments* did the world redeem.

Now this is not merely unmitigated nonsense, but very nearly heathenism. These verses depict a God so angry with mankind that He would only be pacified by having His own Son butchered. They also depict a God Who had prepared "endless torments for His

creatures, but was induced to abandon this pleasant scheme by an offer on the part of His Son to be killed in the place of the culprits destined for these torments. Moreover, they assume that the Father had one kind of mind and the Son another, the Father being angry and vindictive and the Son loving and self-sacrificing. This kind of teaching makes complete nonsense of Jesus' death; but such teaching is still given and believed.

It *is* nonsense, firstly, because the mind of God towards mankind has never been anything else than *love*, and that mind of God is seen in Jesus Christ. His mind and the mind of God are the same thing. God who "first loved us" has never needed to be reconciled to us, and the New Testament nowhere speaks of God being reconciled to us, but of *our* being reconciled to *God*—a very different matter! Secondly, because the only thing from which man has ever needed to be "saved" is his sins. To save us from *punishment* is to begin at the wrong end, for it is from our selfishness and greed and lusts and hatreds and meannesses that we need to be rescued: And this is obvious.

Now there is only one way to do this, and that is to *make us sorry*. The problem therefore in front of God is to find a way to make us sorry. And the only way to do that is the way of love. Love is the only thing in the world which ever makes people really sorry; and the one thing calculated to make us ashamed and repentant is for us to discover that we have all the time been sinning, not against Someone Who is waiting to punish us, but against Someone Who loves us more than we have ever realised or dreamt of.

The most awful thing that we can ever do in this world is to sin against those who love us dearly. But Jesus on His Cross is the measure of the love of God towards us. It is either that, or it is simply the darkest spot in the world's history.

The New Testament has always said that Calvary is the love of God. May not the New Testament be right? Jesus knew that love is the only Ransomer,

and that to die for men was the one and only way; because, brought face to face with love like that, "many" would begin to be sorry for and ashamed about their sins, and would want to turn away from *them* and towards *Him*.

Thus his death would become a "ransom for many"; for we are ransomed when we are set free from the chain of our sins by coming to love Him more than we love *them*. This "change of mind" in us the New Testament calls "repentance," and, with the great hope in His heart that His death would do *that* for us, He staggered up the Hill of Calvary with His Cross. "He died to make us good," says a children's hymn. The whole Gospel is in that one line.

Calvary is God's method of dealing with us; the method of love. Having given us free will, He cannot force us. He can only *draw* us. What we have to do is to ask ourselves what answer we are going to make to this love of God. Will we listen or not? It is to our hearts and not to our heads that God is speaking.

If we steel our hearts against Jesus on His Cross, then there is nothing more that God can do for us. This is His last word to us. But if Jesus can succeed in making us sorry and making us love Him with our whole hearts, He will have done what He died to do: He will, "see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied." What are we going to do about it?

XIV—The Forgiveness of Sins

There are two facts which no attentive reader of the New Testament can very well fail to see. The first is the overwhelming importance attached by the writers of that book to the death of Christ on Good Friday. Whereas references to His life and teaching are rare in the Epistles to the point of being remarkable, His death upon the Cross stands in the very forefront of their message about Him, and it is upon this that attention is focussed almost to the exclusion of every-

thing else. "We preach," they say, "Christ crucified."

The second is that the good news which they proclaimed to men is that through that death they are offered the forgiveness of sins. "Be it known unto you, therefore, that through this Man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins." "We have the redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins."

Equally plain is it that, in speaking of His death, Christ never thought of it either as an accident or a failure, nor even as a mere martyrdom. He consistently regarded it as having a redemptive power. He spoke of "giving His life a ransom for many"; of His blood being "shed for the remission of sins." He thought of Himself as "the Good Shepherd laying down His life for the sheep."

Now, whatever view we may take of the events recorded in the Gospels, it is not really possible to ignore this fact. Rightly or wrongly, there it is, the most conspicuous thing in the New Testament. When everything has been said which can be said, it remains an incontestable fact that from the very first the Christian message to the world has been the forgiveness of sins through the death of Christ. That death was never at any time preached as a martyrdom or as an unfortunate climax. It was preached as the ground of the forgiveness of men's sins at the hands of God. It was preached as a sacrifice made deliberately with this intention; as a voluntary propitiation and atonement for the sins of men as a way of liberation, and never as anything else.

But that is not all, for equally incontestable is it that just in proportion as that death of Christ has been lifted up and proclaimed to men as the way of the forgiveness of sins, just so far has the Christian message had power and success. This is sufficiently remarkable to be worth our very serious attention. Further, not only is this so, but, whether we can explain it or not, it is undoubtedly true that in all ages literally millions of people who have accepted this message about Christ's death have found it to be just simply true, and have

entered through it into the peace of God. They have experienced a real sense of forgiveness, of liberation, and of renewal: old things have passed away: all things have become new. Whenever men and women have made a complete break with their past and begun to live lives so entirely transformed that they can only be described as " new creatures," you will find that this has been directly due to the death of Christ and that it started with a sense of forgiveness which had come to them through looking up to that Cross on Calvary.

The most completely atheistic historian would be compelled, if he was a sincere and honest historian, to admit that Good Friday has done more than anything recorded in the world's history to change the course of human lives. These facts constitute nothing less than a direct challenge. To attempt to brush them aside or ignore them or treat them as if they were not there is to do something which justifies a pessimistic view of human intelligence.

One would have thought that Good Friday was a day which challenged any man, for once in his life, to *think* rather than to golf, or motor, or play football, for there is something here which at least demands an explanation. Why does one death, and one only, in the world's history, have a quality which no other death has had? How comes it that one man in all the world can declare that His death will prove to be a ransom for many, and His words come true? There must be something in it somewhere. Is there not at least enough that is mysterious about it to raise the question whether One Who has actually made good such an extraordinary and apparently impossible claim was not something more than man? Why have none of the many heroic deaths of ordinary mankind this power to speak peace and forgiveness to human hearts?

But if the New Testament is right in saying that " God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself," then the thing is explicable. Some of us can see no other explanation save that Calvary really is the love of God trying to save us out of our sins, and the outstretched arms, the arms of God held wide to welcome

all who will come. The real tragedy of the human race is that it has never recognised, until too late, those who would have been its saviours; has never known the things which belong unto its peace.

There is a widespread spirit to-day which, in face of all the too obvious wrongs which darken human life, invites us to accept the airy assurance that "sin is nothing serious," and which, wrapped in a pathetic self-satisfaction, is sublimely unaware that our one paramount need is to be delivered from our sins and to find repentance and forgiveness. This comfortable complacency Good Friday meets with the abrupt challenge of a gaunt and bloodstained Cross surmounted by an enormous note of interrogation from God, Who is asking whether we are quite sure that our estimate of sin is the right one.

His estimate of sin is set forth *there*. Does it not fit the facts somewhat better than ours; and should we not, did we but know it, be showing some real intelligence if we humbled ourselves before Him at the foot of the green hill far away and asked Him, through Him who died there, "to give us true repentance and to forgive us all our sins, negligences and ignorances?"

XV.—A Problem

The New Testament is obviously a book written by men who have been *made glad;* who have discovered some tremendous secret of joy which they are trying to pass on to others. They are men who have "the good news," to tell. There is no more cheerful and optimistic book in the world; and this fact about it at once raises a question.

How did such a book ever come to be written? "Men do not gather grapes of thorns nor figs of thistles;" neither do they gather gladness from gloomy hearts and disappointed hopes. A book of such radiant cheerfulness can come only from the pens of men who have no doubt whatever that "God's in His heaven:

all's well with the world." "All's well!" That is the outstanding message of this cheery book.

Now it is this problem of the *gladness* which streams from every page of the New Testament which those must solve who are "doubtful in Christ's Resurrection," whence all this tremendous cheerfulness and courage; whence this "good news" if Jesus was dead, and Calvary the end of everything? For they *are* glad, manifestly and obviously. Listen to this: "God Who commanded the light to shine out of darkness hath *shined in our hearts*, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory (i.e., the radiant character) of God in the face of Jesus Christ." "This is the message which we declare unto you that God is Light, and in Him is no darkness at all." None but men who are tremendously happy can write like this about God.

Therefore you have got to build a bridge somehow between the evening of Good Friday, when Jesus died with the despairing cry: "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" and the day when his disciples sat down to write with full hearts a message to the world like this. Their message is that through Jesus, Who was crucified, they have come to know with absolute certainty that God is love and light, and that there is happiness for everybody in fellowship with Him.

What an odd and unexpected conclusion to draw from the dark tragedy of Good Friday, when God had let Jesus die desolate on His Cross, crushed by all the forces of evil, "the very scorn of men?" How can God, if He did that, be light, and in Him no darkness at all? How by any conceivable process could they have come to see in the awful Cross of Jesus an overwhelming proof of the *love* of God? How did they come to see in Jesus, forsaken by God and left to die, God's own dearly beloved son?

Unless somewhere there is a bridge between Calvary and such writing as this, we are reading what is merely extravagant nonsense. Yet nowhere in the world can you read words behind which there is more passionate conviction and certainty; never did men more manifestly know what they are talking about; and if there

is one thing more striking than another about the lives and outlook of these disciples of Jesus with whom we have to deal in the New Testament, it is their astoundingly healthy *sanity*. They are the one set of people in the Roman Empire who are standing right side up. Compared with them all other people might almost be said to be standing on their heads.

Now the Resurrection is such a bridge, and no other is strong enough to carry you over. Without it you stand looking across a chasm over which there is no way. The accounts of the Risen Jesus given by the Evangelists are incoherent and to some extent conflicting, but about the certainty of the disciples as to the *fact* that Jesus still lived, there can be no question. The very incoherence of these accounts is actually a testimony to their genuineness, for they are just such accounts as would be given by men who are trying to recapture with difficulty their impressions of an overwhelming experience by which they have been surprised.

If it be said that their conviction about Jesus was a delusion, the answer is that anyhow it remained a *permanent* one. Time and hard facts will dispel most convictions which really are illusory. Here was a conviction which, instead of wearing thin with the lapse of time, did precisely the opposite, grew intenser as the days and years went by, and became in them the source of a completely new life marked by unfailing joy and a courage which nothing could defeat. If the New Testament shows us lives lived like this, it is because it is a book which contains the story of a Resurrection.

Is this story impossible? Well, read Sir Philip Gibbs's *The Day After To-morrow* and see what science is saying. It will leave you realising that the man who says that this or that "is impossible" had better get down at once to reading science. "The new facts that we get do but extend the problem of life beyond any limits that we can foresee." Every advance of science increases the probability that this utterly mysterious thing, life, is indestructible and possesses *inherent creative* powers of which at present we

understand next to nothing. *Anything* can happen. That is the evidence of science.

We may fairly test the truth of any religion by its power to create gladness in men's hearts and goodness in their lives. Here is a religion, based on the belief that Jesus lives, which does both these things. What are the alternatives to it? Atheism? Determinism? Materialism? All these lead precisely *nowhere*, unless it be to the hopeless and nakedly selfish gospel "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die." Why not adventure on a religion which at least *leads somewhere;* which through twenty centuries has proved itself able to make men cheerful and good, and which has a message which enables them to face the manifold dark problems of this perplexing world with a hopefulness which is indomitable?

XVI.—Footprints

For Robinson Crusoe, on his desert island, a single naked footprint in the sand was proof positive that someone had passed along what he thought was an empty shore. Nothing else would account for the existence of that mark left on the sand. In the same way the world has had certain footprints left upon it which are impossible to account for, unless someone or something once passed that way.

The shape of many of our hills and valleys is a proof of the passing of the ice during the glacial period. Every ruined Norman castle is a witness to the coming of the Normans to these shores, and so are many of the French words left behind in our language. The English Prayer Book is a footprint left behind by the Reformation. Trafalgar Square owes its existence to the events of October 21st, 1805. None of these things could be where they are unless somewhere in the past there had been some event, some happening to account for their existence.

And amongst the events of the past which have left

their footprints behind them is the Resurrection. There are certain things in the world to-day which are most extraordinarily difficult to account for unless something quite unusual happened on the first Easter Day long ago.

And the first of these is Sunday. To-day about one-third of the world keeps the first day of the week as a Holy Day and a day of worship. Before the year 30 A.D., or thereabouts, no one in the world kept Sunday as a special day. The Roman Empire kept no particular day in the week: the Jews kept Saturday. And for Jews Saturday was *the Sabbath*. You have only to read your Gospels to see that if there was one institution in the world to which a Jew attached absolutely overwhelming importance, it was the keeping of Saturday as a Holy Day. Nothing in their religion could compete in importance with the keeping of the sacred Sabbath. It would have needed at least a world-wide earthquake to have persuaded a Jew to change what was the very heart of his religion—the keeping of the Sabbath—and adopt another day instead. It would be less difficult to persuade English people to suddenly adopt Tuesday as the weekly Holy Day instead of Sunday than it would be to induce a Jew to exchange Saturday for Sunday.

Yet the thing actually happened, and it was done voluntarily by men who were Jews by religion. For all Our Lord's first disciples were Jews; and so strong was Jewish influence in the early Christian Church, that the Christians were commonly regarded as a Jewish sect, and Gentiles were excluded and circumcision enforced for quite a long time. Yet of their own accord men who were Jews had within a very short space after Good Friday allowed their sacred Sabbath to be eclipsed by another day—"the first day of the week."

We have therefore to find a fact sufficiently powerful to cause this change of the Sabbath into Sunday; for great effects are not produced without great causes. Christ's Resurrection on the first day of the week is the only really adequate explanation of this change

of day, and Sunday remains with us as a footprint which the Resurrection has left behind it.

The second footprint left by the Resurrection is " The Breaking of Bread," with its atmosphere of gladness and thanksgiving. This was admittedly a service held in memory of Christ's death. The broken bread was His Body broken for them ; the red wine of the cup was His Blood shed for them. The day therefore, for commemorating Christ's death was obviously Friday, the day on which He died. But instead of celebrating the Breaking of Bread on Friday, they did so on the first day of the week ! Why ?

Clearly there was some fact in their minds which eclipsed even Good Friday and which made Sunday the appropriate day for celebrating the Breaking of Bread. And here again nothing except the Resurrection will account for this choice of Sunday in preference to Friday. Sunday was the Resurrection Day, and it is plain enough that, if they did indeed meet to remember the Lord's dying, there was something which they were still more anxious to remember, and that was His Resurrection ; and to them the Breaking of Bread was as much (or even more) a memorial of the Resurrection as it was of the Crucifixion.

But that is not all. Not only was Sunday and not Friday, chosen, but there was also an entire absence from this service of any trace whatever of that atmosphere of sadness which we associate with what we call memorial services. On the contrary, it was always an occasion of gladness, held in close association with a " Love-feast " of happy fellowship, and one of the very earliest names to be given to it was the " Eucharist " (Thanksgiving), which shows plainly enough that Thanksgiving was pre-eminently the atmosphere in which this service was held.

This note of gladness and thanksgiving has always marked the Christian Sunday, which has nothing whatever to do with the Jewish Sabbath, but has always been the weekly Festival of the Resurrection. If people generally would realise that Sunday is, before everything else, the Lord's Resurrection Day,

they would perhaps see a good and sufficient reason for trying to keep it and for making the Christian Act of Thanksgiving in the Breaking of Bread.

There are, of course, difficulties in believing in Christ's Resurrection, but it is just as well to remember that the difficulties are not all on one side, and that there are so many facts in the world which it is most extremely hard to account for without the Resurrection, that the difficulties of disbelief are at least as great as those of belief. It has left certain well-marked footprints behind it, and the third, and by far the most important, of these footprints is the existence of the Christian Church.

XVII.—The Christian Church and the Resurrection

In "Hymns Ancient and Modern" there is an evening hymn (No. 477) which is known to those of us in whom the faculty of humour is stronger than that of reverence as "Matins in Australia." It states, however, a truth which, if Christian people were not compelled by their religion to be humble-minded, would cause them almost to burst with justifiable pride. The sun never sets on the Christian Church.

> "As o'er each continent and island
> The dawn leads on another day,
> The voice of prayer is never silent,
> Nor dies the strain of praise away."

This statement is just literally true. There is never a second of the 86,400 which go to make up a day when somewhere or other in the world some Christian voice is not rising in prayer or praise to God in the name of Jesus Christ. From Cape Horn to Greenland, from San Francisco to Shanghai is spread the Christian Church. It is incomparably the greatest organisation in the world. Measured against this Empire of Christ, the British Empire steps into the background. We are bound to ask when, where, and how this tremendous phenomenon made its first appearance? A very little

reflection will show that at least three things are necessary in order to give any kind of rational account of its origin.

And first, of course, there had to be the men who were capable of setting on foot this colossal, world-wide movement. Admittedly these men were the first disciples of Jesus of Nazareth. There are no other claimants to this honour. This being so, it is natural to ask whether a group of men who had seen every hope which they had ever placed in their Master shattered by his ignominious death on Good Friday were in the smallest degree capable of launching out on a campaign through the length and breadth of the Roman Empire to found a kingdom in the name of One Who had proved to be a complete failure and Whose claims were shown to be a delusion.

Men who are disillusioned, disappointed, downcast, and even frightened, as these men were (on their own confession), are not the kind of men who are in any state of mind to set forth on an enterprise such as this. If they had been convinced that Good Friday was the end of their Master's career, the only thing which they would have been in the least likely to do would have been to disperse and go quietly back to their homes, wiser and sadder men. We should have heard no more of them.

It is really impossible to account for their actual conduct unless in some way or other their courage and hope and their confidence in Christ had been entirely renewed. Their own story is that this is precisely what was done for them by the Resurrection, and if they had good reasons for being completely convinced about this fact, their new state of mind is explicable and we have an adequate cause to account for a great effect. Otherwise we are left with a baffling and insoluble problem.

Secondly, there is needed Someone to give what the Duke of Wellington used to call "the marching orders" of Christianity. On their own showing, at the time of the Crucifixion, these disciples had no other idea in their heads than that of a local Kingship of Christ as

King of the Jews at Jerusalem. The very last conception which their minds were capable of forming was that of a *world-wide spiritual* kingdom embracing all nations. Anyone who knows anything at all of the Jewish mentality at that period will realise this. It was utterly impossible for any such vision to dawn upon them. Nothing could have been further from their thoughts.

Whence, then, came to them the idea of going into all the world and preaching the Gospel to every creature? To say that it originated in their own brains is to postulate an almost incredible miracle. Easier for the leopard to change his spots than for men such as these to reverse, without apparent rhyme or reason, the habits of thought of a life-time and of their own accord to think such new and strange thoughts as these.

But if the Resurrection be true, everything is explained. If there was Someone to show the new vision and to give the marching orders; able, too, to inspire them with the belief that He was alive for evermore and, in virtue of that, King of a Kingdom which is not of this world, then we can understand whence this new impulse came which sent them toiling across half Europe to make disciples of all the nations. But without the Resurrection their action is totally inexplicable; and how could there, anyhow, be any kingdom at all of a Christ Who was dead?

And, lastly, there is needed a message to preach. You cannot very well set forth on a preaching campaign with no message to preach as "good news" for the world? To say that a Galilean peasant had been crucified is no message at all. To say that the Best and Bravest Who ever lived had been defeated by the powers of evil, abandoned by God and dragged to a shameful death, is anything but good news. It is bad news of the worst kind, calculated to make men despair of God and of humanity. Yet within thirty years of the Crucifixion the good news which turned the world upside down and called into existence the world-wide Christian Church had been preached throughout the greater part of the Roman Empire.

And so, again, without the Resurrection you are left with a psychological problem of the most difficult kind, viz., how men who had nothing but bad news in their experience set out to preach the good news of God to all nations, and on that good news (which was either a lie or a delusion, if the Resurrection was not true), built the Christian Church which is still here to-day.

XVIII.—"Jesus, the Lord"

Religion probably appears to many people to be a complicated business, hard to understand. It seems to be an affair of creeds, doctrines, services, sacraments, ceremonies, and what not. It is, of course, true that all these things exist *in connection with* religion, but *they are not religion itself*, any more than the clothes which you wear are the same things as yourself. All these things are the clothes which religion has to wear in order to be visible and to function in the midst of this material world. Religion cannot walk about the world without clothes any more than you can; but we must be careful not to mistake the clothes for the thing itself. Yet this is the mistake which many people make, and it is a very natural one. The Christian religion itself is really an exceedingly simple thing. It is a friendship with Jesus Christ. The word "religion" might almost be translated "friendship." The probable derivation of the Latin word "religio" is from a verb which means "to bind." Religion is, therefore, "a bond," "a tie," between a man and his God. Why not say "a friendship"? And that is precisely what you find in the New Testament, this idea of a friendship with an unseen Friend whom Christian people speak of as "Jesus, the Lord."

If you come to think of it, it was in the form of a simple friendship that the Christian religion began. Certain men and women in Galilee came to know some one called "Jesus of Nazareth." Their acquaintanceship ripened into a friendship. They had at that time

no creed, no sacraments, no churches, no services as Christians. All that they had was a friendship with Jesus. They loved Him, and this devotion to him became their religion, and it was a very true and real religion or bond. Also it was an entirely simple thing; something which anyone could have; which anyone could understand.

But in process of time this friendship underwent a transformation, or rather Jesus Himself became transformed in their minds. They had begun by knowing Him just simply as Jesus of Nazareth, a wonderful Teacher Who "spake as never man spake." They thought of Him as the Master, and of themselves as His disciples or "learners." Then gradually through being with Him they reached the conviction that He was the Messiah or Christ of God, Whom Holy Scripture had long foretold, and Who had now at last come from God to be the Redeemer. And so "Jesus" became "Jesus, the Christ." But there was still one more step to come. They took this step quite naturally, almost unconsciously, after Good Friday and Easter, and Jesus became for them not merely the Christ, but "the Lord." He was no longer just the human friend Whom they had known at first; no longer simply the promised Christ, but the unseen Lord at the right hand of God. This change in their way of thinking about Jesus made no difference to their friendship with Him, which went on just the same as ever; for He had not changed in character. He was still the same Jesus Whom they had always known, but He had been "lifted up" and transfigured. God had "given Him a name which was above every name"; and He had become "the Lord." Religion was still a simple friendship with Him, but it had become a very wonderful thing. Looking back to the days in Galilee, they were now convinced that in getting to know Him they had come to know God himself. In Him they had beheld "the glory of God full of grace and truth."

So that every Christian in the New Testament is looking *up*; he is not merely looking *back*; and you cannot make any sense out of the New Testament

unless you realise that everywhere and all the time "behind the scenes" there is this Jesus Who has become "the Lord." No Christian in the New Testament ever thinks of Jesus simply as a beloved Teacher Who had passed away and is affectionately remembered: nor yet merely as a wonderful example to be copied, but he thinks of him as the Lord Who is his heavenly Friend and ever-present Master, to Whom he belongs, and to Whom his allegiance is pledged. This friendship with the unseen Lord is the whole Christian religion in a nutshell. It consists just simply in that.

There is much to be said about this friendship with Jesus, but this much must suffice for the moment. Firstly, it is worth while asking, "How did it come about that He Who began as being known as Jesus the Carpenter of Nazareth ended by being enthroned in men's hearts and minds as 'the Lord' at the right hand of God?" Has anyone else ever performed such an astounding feat? On any showing, was not the Person Who was able to do such an amazing thing as to produce this conviction in men's minds at least unique and not as other men are? Never mind *how* it happened: it *did* happen. It is therefore a phenomenon which has to be accounted for somehow. Secondly, this is the reason why Christianity is the only religion which is really of any use as a religion, because it offers you not merely a book to read, not merely a teaching to follow, but *a Person to love.* Now books are sometimes hard to understand, and precepts are not always easy to follow, but anyone can start a friendship. And Christians are just simply people who keep up a daily and life-long friendship with Jesus, the Lord. If it be said that such a friendship must be something purely imaginary, the answer is that many millions of people have found it the most real thing in their lives, and have lived entirely on the strength of it. It is worth trying, and it is open to any man that will to test it. "The personal friendship of Jesus Christ our Lord was that gift which God was incarnate to bestow on every man who sought it."

XIX.—"Christus Æternus"

"He ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty." So says the Apostles' Creed. What is the real meaning of this statement? Let us concede at once that Heaven is not a place whence Christ could "come down" or whither he could "ascend." It is not a locality in space situated somewhere in those vast regions of interstellar vapour of which Professor Eddington has been telling us.

Nor would any intelligent person wish to interpret the phrase "He sitteth on the right hand of God" as other than a symbolical expression. Human language, when it tries to express the deep things of God, of necessity breaks down. We are compelled to fall back upon picture-thinking and symbolism, and to make use of words like "ascend" and "descend," because human conceptions can only be drawn from human experience. What we have to do is to get behind the language used, and (remembering what a very imperfect instrument language is) fasten upon the *ideas* which it is struggling to express. For an idea may be in itself perfectly true even though the language in which it is clothed is inadequate.

The fact which the language of the Apostles' Creed is trying to express is that He Whom men first knew as the Carpenter of Nazareth ended by being identified in their minds with "the Lord of Glory." It seems an amazing and almost incredible thing to have happened: but it *did* happen. There can be no question about that. Indeed, this belief that God has made Jesus of Nazareth "King of Kings and Lord of Lords" and "given him a Name which is above every name" is the keystone of the Christian faith. This affirmation is at once its distinctive note and the thing which constitutes its real value. Robbed of this faith that "Jesus is the Lord," the Christian religion has not much more help to offer men than any other religion.

In the correspondence columns of a daily newspaper

some time ago the question was asked, " What has Christianity to offer us which is not offered equally well by any other religion ? " The answer is, of course, that it offers " power from on high," by which it means quite definitely the help and strength which come from a living Saviour Who (in figurative language) " sitteth on the right hand of God." Other religions offer men good advice. The Christian religion is the only religion which offers men *power*—the power to live well. If it be asked on what foundation does it rest its claim to be a religion which not only guides, but also *enables*, the answer is that the teaching of the Church about its Master rests not on abstract theory or theological speculation, but has its foundations in what men have actually experienced of Him.

The New Testament is written from end to end by men who appeal for everything which they have to tell us to the actual experience which they themselves have made of Jesus Christ. It is a Book which might be described as belonging to that class of literature which we call " Confessions "—books in which men and women tell us of their most intimate inward experiences. Their testimony about Him is that they have found Him to be a living force, in such a sense that, when they have freely yielded up their hearts to Him, they have found that their deeds and words came to be determined by and to be an expression of His spirit : that they have not had merely to endeavour to imitate His actions, but that (as they express it) they have found Him " dwelling in them " as a Force which takes them in charge and carries them (sometimes) " whither they would not."

Nor is this experience which men have made of Christ confined to the lives of individuals. In history, also, in the course of two thousand years, Christianity has proved itself to be not merely a book, a theology, or a system of ethics, but *a force*. It has been, and still is, a force reaching through history and shaping the world ; and the outstanding fact about Jesus Christ is that He has been *creative*. It is this conviction

about the permanence of Christ, about His unique value, about His continuously experienced power which the language used about the Ascension is attempting to express. "The right hand of God" means the place whence spiritual power proceeds; whence the life-force which is creative issues forth.

Jesus Christ has been found by experience to be a life-force in the lives of individuals and in human history like no other; and, so far from His creative power having exhausted itself in the course of two thousand years, it is manifest that it is, on the contrary, continually gathering fresh momentum. Of this fact the Overseas Mission Field alone is sufficient evidence. The missionary works a miracle which all the resources of science and civilisation cannot perform. He creates a new moral character in peoples foul with the vices of heathenism: he draws whole races to levels of higher life. Whenever the Church casts itself unreservedly on the strength of Christ and takes Him seriously, there is always a resurrection, evidence of a new life. This could not be if His force were spent. So Christian people believe, and have good reason for believing, that Christ liveth for evermore in that spiritual world which mysteriously interpenetrates this world, and which, for want of a better name, we call "Heaven." They believe that "God has given Him a Name which is above every name." And that indeed is true; for only along the lines of Jesus Christ is religion possible to the modern man. For the really educated man of to-day there is no other religion: Christ has no competitor whom thinking people could for one moment take seriously. It is Jesus Christ or nobody: and, if He has not passed away, He remains the concern of all who *do* take life seriously.

XX—The Holy Spirit

We said that the disciples of Jesus were not conscious of any interruption of their friendship with Him

through His being taken from them. Though seen no more by human eyes, His living Presence continues to pervade every page of the New Testament which follows the Ascension, and He remains just as real and vivid to them as He was in the days when He walked with them in Galilee.

Saint Luke, in his account of how Jesus was " parted from them," mentions a fact which is so odd and unusual that it is beyond the reach of any man's invention, and must therefore represent the simple truth. It is that " they returned to Jerusalem *with great joy* " ! This is scarcely the frame of mind which we associate with partings from very dear friends. People who, on the quay-side or the railway station, have just said good-bye to those whom they love best and whom they never expect to see again, generally turn homewards with hearts too full for words, and with the tears not very far away. Anyhow, they do not return " with great joy " !

That state of mind of the disciples, when parting from their Master, was one of joy shows that they were confidently looking forward to a new and deeper experience of His Presence with them. " Lo, I am with you all the days, even unto the end of the world " ; that had been His last promise to them.

We naturally turn to the Acts to see what will happen, and here it becomes perfectly clear that He *is* still with them. It never even occurs to them to doubt it. His guidance is sought naturally on every matter ; and, with the cheeriest optimism, they set out to carry His Gospel into the great Roman world, trusting entirely to His unfailing support in carrying out this stupendous task from which such a little handful of " unlearned and ignorant men " might well have shrunk.

The sole reason why they are entirely undismayed is because they are quite dead sure that He is with them. No one probably will wish to deny the altogether amazing success which they achieved, a success totally impossible to account for, if these hitherto distinctly feeble and hesitating disciples had had no other than their own resources. *They got power from*

somewhere, and wisdom and courage. In face of the facts it seems impossible to deny *that*. If to-day one-third of the world is Christian, it is because of the courage and initiative displayed by this little handful of "nobodies," who had denied and deserted Jesus on Good Friday and had remained trembling behind closed doors for fear of the Jews. Clearly something happened to them which entirely transformed them.

How are we to explain this phenomenon? Their own explanation was, "that they had received the Holy Spirit" whom Jesus had promised to them. People find the doctrine of the Holy Spirit peculiarly difficult and bewildering. No doubt it is; but it is worth while remembering that the first disciples never stopped to formulate any such doctrine deliberately and consciously. They simply accepted, quite naturally and without any intellectual reasoning, facts as they found them. Asked about the Holy Spirit, they would not have replied that He was "the Third Person of the Blessed Trinity," but simply that "He was the Spirit of Jesus," the Presence of God in their hearts, which had come to them as a result of their fellowship with their Master, the Lord Christ.

It is doubtful as a matter of fact whether (at all events, at first) they made any clear distinction in their minds between the Holy Spirit and Jesus Himself. They speak of him as "the Spirit of Jesus," and think of Him quite naturally as the Presence of their Unseen Master in their hearts teaching, guiding, and enabling them; above all, keeping them in constant close touch with Him. "I will not leave you orphans; *I* will come to you," He had said. They never doubted that this was just simply true and acted on the assumption that it was so.

The Holy Spirit is understandable directly we grasp the fact that Christianity is not a system of doctrine, but a *Personal Force*. The writer was present not long ago at a conference on Overseas Missions. About one hundred and fifty people were there. Looking round that room one asked oneself, "What had brought these people of all kinds and classes together on a Saturday

to spend what for most of them was their weekly half-holiday in discussing how the news of Jesus could be carried overseas?" The answer was that it was the *personal force* of Jesus Christ which had brought them there. They were all extremely sensible and sober-minded people, entirely free from emotion. What they were doing was in no sense for their own benefit—quite the contrary. It meant for all of them sacrifice and expense.

But a Personal Force stronger than themselves held them there, with the whole mind and will of each one of them bent on the one thought of what they had *got* to do for Christ. This sort of things needs accounting for. Is it, after all, incredible that a Life should have been lived which was so altogether unique that the Personality enshrined in it has remained an unspent force throughout the centuries? To say "I believe in the Holy Spirit" means I believe that the Personality of Jesus Christ remains a *living* force, undiminished and ultimately imperishable.

It is not really comparable in any way to the mere lingering influence of some good man who has passed away. *It is so much more than that.* It is a living and compelling force which takes men and women and "carries them whither they would not." It is so full of vitality, so potent, as to suggest that it can proceed only from Someone Who still lives. Does that seem a very difficult thing to believe, in face of the fact of this overmastering Personal Force, the existence of which it is not really possible to deny?

XXI.—The Friend Within

The nearer religious teaching approaches to the truth, the closer does it bring God and man to each other. This process can be seen taking place in the Bible, which is a Book in which men's knowledge of God gradually becomes fuller and deeper the further you go. The prophets have a much better knowledge of God than, e.g., The Book of Judges. They bring God much

nearer to men, make His relationship to them a much more personal one and tell men to think of Him as being intimately concerned in their individual lives and doings.

This was a great step forward towards the truth, but it remained for the New Testament to carry this teaching one step further and, with its message about the Holy Spirit, to lead men to think of God as even still nearer to them than this—as God *within* men, dwelling in their hearts. Of this fact the Old Testament contains only some very rare and isolated hints; but the indwelling of God in men's hearts is one of the great, clear and distinctive messages of the New Testament, which teaches with unhesitating assurance that the right place in which to look for God is within your own heart, and that it is there that you will most surely find Him.

For this is the real meaning of what is known as the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Disentangled from the very difficult theological dogma of the Trinity, the teaching of the New Testament about the Holy Spirit, when reduced to its simplest terms, means just this, that through Jesus Christ men have come to make a new and more intimate experience of God than ever before, and to find Him, no longer merely above them, or about them or even with them, but *in* them. The soul of man is the dwelling-place of God, who, for this reason needs not "temples made with hands," for "your bodies are the temple of the Holy Ghost who is in you."

In order to be a Christian it is not necessary to understand the Athanasian Creed: it is only necessary to believe that God is "nearer to you than breathing, closer than hands and feet," and that His nature and character are embodied in Jesus Christ. The God who dwells within men's hearts is God in terms of Jesus Christ. He is like Him. So that in the New Testament Christians talk indifferently about God dwelling in their hearts, Christ dwelling in their hearts, and the Holy Spirit dwelling in their hearts. To them it all meant one and the same thing: they never stopped to distinguish.

Now it is obvious that not all men have this sense of the close and intimate Presence of God within their hearts, because God, of course, is like any other guest in the sense that He has to be invited to come in, and a place must be made for Him. "Behold I stand at the door and knock. If any man hear My voice and open the door, I will come in to him and will sup with him and he with Me."

We get the suggestion of intimate and friendly companionship; a picture of two friends conversing with each other at a supper-table. God in the Person of Christ comes as a friendly guest. There is a well-known picture by Holman Hunt, "The Light of the World," in which Our Lord is seen standing without and knocking at the door. He carries a lantern. But the door has the appearance of having been long closed; weeds and briars have grown up before it. *The handle is on the inside!* The would-be Guest and His lantern cannot come in until that door is opened for Him from inside.

Well, God-in-Christ gets no admittance to many hearts because He is believed to be a disturbing and uncomfortable Guest. But that is a complete delusion. He is our very best Friend. Holman Hunt's picture is quite right; He is a friend who bears the scars of love in hands and feet and carries a cheerful lamp. He will not hurt you: He brings nothing but friendliness and good cheer.

If you open the door, certain things will happen. In the first place you will never again feel lonely. The world is full of lonely and friendless people. Whitsuntide tells of a Friend Whose companionship is worth having. And it is quite a real thing. There are people who would never feel lonely even on a desert island. They have a Companion who is always there. In some curious way, which it is difficult to explain, there is a distinct and vivid consciousness of a Presence which brings cheerfulness and courage and the sense of a great peace of heart.

The next thing that happens is that you find yourself getting guidance. The Guest, you remember,

carries a lantern which throws light on many things within your doors. Here is Someone with whom you can discuss your problems and your difficulties; what you ought to do and what you ought not to do. Ask Him about it: He will talk it over with you. "If I were in your place," He will say, "I should do so and so." "No! I should not do *that*: it would not be right, nor kind, nor just." "I should not do *that*, either. It will degrade you if you do."

We sometimes call this the voice of conscience. People are afraid of listening to their conscience, but really it is the voice of a Friend Who loves us and wants to see us at our best. It should therefore always be listened to. It is the voice of Someone "from Whom all holy desires, all good counsels and all just works do proceed." If you take His advice, you will always end by being glad that you did. You will find that He was right all the time.

Suppose we turn the handle inside that door and ask Him to step in!

XXII—God.

"Trinity Sunday!" So the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God: and yet they are not three Gods, but one God." Thus the Athanasian Creed. And it is of course quite easy to be impatient with this kind of theological definition; yet a wise man will be slow to do so. It is not nearly as foolish as it sounds; if only because each human being has himself a threefold personality welded into the unity of an individual. It takes reason, will and desire to make one whole man; and if we are ourselves "triune," why not God? This is only an imperfect analogy, it is true; but may not this trinity in the personality of man be a finger-post pointing to the truth about God? Then again, the higher we rise in the scale of existence, the more complex does personality become. A man is infinitely more complex and mysterious than a plant or a horse. Why therefore be surprised if you are told

that God is more complex and mysterious in His Personality than we are? But it is not our purpose to go into this deep question here.

As to the Creeds, surely no wise person who has read any history will wish to quarrel with the Church for having defined her faith, and stated it in black and white. She simply *had* to: she had really no choice in the matter.

The alternatives before her were *definition* or *chaos*. On any showing it was better that the Church should know what she believed than not to know; and having made up her mind as to what it was that she did believe, she endeavoured to put it into words. Why not? What could have been a more ridiculous and impotent spectacle than a Church confronting the world with a message, and, on being asked what that message was, having to say "that she did not know, for the message was anything or nothing"! The fact is that this present-day depreciation of creeds betrays really a want of thought and of common sense. I would rather know what I believed and be able to say what it was, even if I was wrong, than not to know at all what I did believe. To have a creed is only to say that you at least believe something definite. Most of us prefer to deal with a man who believes *something*, to dealing with one who believes "any old thing." We do not put much trust in people whose "principles are indefinite." If you do business with such people you are likely to lose money! And what sensible man is going to put his trust in a religion whose principles are indefinite? However, that is not what this article is about. It is about what kind of idea of God we have in our minds; for that is really the underlying thought of Trinity Sunday. The Being of God.

So, leaving the Athanasian Creed behind us, not because it has no value, but because it presents an almost entirely *intellectual* conception of God, which is too philosophical for most of us, let us go straight to the One Person Who is quite certain to be able to give us accurate information about God and see what He has to tell us. He tells us so much that it would require

at least a volume (perhaps several) to write it all down.

The first thing which strikes you is that Jesus simply and quietly *assumes* God. He never argues about His existence or makes any attempt to *prove* His reality. For Him the existence of God is no more an open question than His own existence. He assumes Him as He assumes the light and the air, perfectly naturally. Nor is His knowledge of God a matter of quotation. He is just simply conscious of the real nearness of God. He is surprised that men should be able to live apparently unaware of it. This surprise peeps out even in His childhood: "Did not they (His parents) *know* that He must be about His Father's business?" On the assumption (which the writer does not share) that Jesus was no more than the world's greatest Spiritual Genius, might not one well hesitate before rejecting off-hand this calm and assured verdict of His about the reality of God? Remember, He was in no sense what one might call a professed mystic. A more entirely sane, practical, and healthy-minded individual never walked this earth. He is so entirely normal; and it is this fact which gives such tremendous weight to His calm assurance about God. God is there: it has never occurred to Jesus to doubt or question it. Are we wiser than He; better able to judge? Why not accept His word for it and act on the assumption that He is right?

Secondly, His teaching is that God is known through the *heart* and not through the intellect. It is "the pure in heart," not the intellectually clever who "see God." "God," He says, "has hidden these things from the wise and prudent and revealed them unto babes," and He thanks God that this is so. It is when we "become as little children," He tells us, that we, "enter into God's Kingdom," and it is just this child-like simplicity of heart which He has Himself. It is one of His great characteristics. All human experience has borne out His testimony, viz., that directly you are willing to give up your sins and to be entirely simple-hearted, you *do* find God; or, as Jesus would say, you *see* God. In this He had been *proved* to be

right, and, what is more, it is open to any one of us to prove it for ourselves. We can do so to-morrow if we will.

XXIII.—"God and Jesus"

Trinity Sunday raises the question of belief in God. People to-day, we are told, want to know about God. Let us hope that this is true; but obviously the first question that needs answering is, "What is it that we want to know about God?"

When someone comes along and tells you that God is the Absolute or the Ultimate Reality, or the Infinite or the Eternal, or something like that, you probably want to say to him "Thank you for nothing. I dare-say He is all those things, but that information is of no earthly use to me." The fact is that it interests you about as much as does Euclid's definition of a plane superficies. Words which are bald and abstract like that really tell you nothing at all, because they try to tell you everything.

If you ask someone what sort of a fellow your neighbour Jones is, and he replies that he is "a physical and psychical cosmic entity," you have been told just precisely nothing about him at all. What you want to be told is what sort of a person he is to know; how does he behave; is he mean or generous; is he friendly or stuck-up; can you trust him, and so forth. In a word, what you want information about is his personal character. You are not really very much interested in anything else about him. If you are told that he is the director of half a dozen large companies and controls vast interests in America, that also it not the real answer to your question, which was "What is he like?"

What you want to hear about is what sort of a neighbour he is to live alongside of, to deal with, and to have social relations with. It is the same with God. The one thing you really want to know about Him is what sort of Person is He? A person's character

is surely the one really important thing about him. A man may be six feet three high, or good-looking, or a great mathematician, but, if you are thinking of establishing a friendship with him, these points about him are only of quite secondary importance. His personal character is the thing which really matters. It is scarcely too much to say that nothing else about him really matters at all.

If, therefore, God wanted to make Himself known to us, this was the one thing about Him which really needed disclosing. Not His omnipotence, nor His omniscience, but His character. And not only is this the only thing about Him that we really need to know, but also it is the greatest thing about Him. The richest, the most concrete and vivid thing which we know in this world is personality. It is the highest and the greatest thing in the universe. The sun's light, the windy heavens, the everlasting hills, the illimitable sea are all of them lower and lesser things than the personality of the least human being. And God's character is the greatest fact about God that there is to know.

It is this which makes the Christian belief in the Incarnation at least credible. If God wanted to show us, not His omnipotence, nor His omniscience, nor his infinity, but His personal character, there was only one way in which He could do so. He must show us His character in the only terms in which it could possibly be intelligible to us, i.e., in terms of a human character, in a human life and voice and face and form.

Moreover, the only way in which we can really get to know a person's character is through action on his part. Descriptions are not of much use. I must see his character displaying itself in actual deeds and actions and words. I really get to know what a man is like when I see what he does and how he speaks and thinks. And, therefore, if we are really to know what God is like, He must live a human life in front of us.

Let a man live with you for one day, and you will

know more about what he is really like than fifty pages of detailed description of his character could tell you. What you really need is to see him " at it " to see him at work and at play, dealing with his fellow men, encountering things like pain and loss—to see, in fact, how he behaves. Then you will really know.

Is there anything to prove that the life which was lived before the eyes of men in Galilee was not a complete expression of the Character of God ? That Life and Character are the very highest, the very best that we know. That Life is there in human history—a life actually lived—the life of the man known as Jesus.

A writer, who is nothing if he is not modern, has said of that Life, " And even to-day there are only two things that can be believed about Jesus by those who can see the facts at all. Either Jesus was God made man, or He was man made God." It does not seem to matter very much which of these alternatives we adopt.

The Christian Church has always believed the former ; but if you take the latter alternative, then it raises the question not " Is Jesus as good as God ? " but " Is God as good as Jesus ? " Because if He is not, then man is greater than his Maker, and the stream has risen above its source. Moreover, most of us would feel that if God is not as good as Jesus, then He has no claim on our serious attention. He is negligible, for we could not give our allegiance to a God less good than that.

Meanwhile, if we are asking the question, " What is God like ? " is it not the part of wisdom, nay, of common sense, to look around us to see where we can find Something (or Someone) which embodies the utmost that we can conceive of spiritual beauty, of grace and truth, and then to say, " If God be only as good and beautiful as what I see in that human life of Jesus—and if God be God at all, how can His character conceivably be less good and beautiful than the best that I have seen in human form ?—then that is good enough for me."

XXIV.—The Teaching of Jesus About God

Christian people believe, of course, that in the human life and character of Jesus we have a portrait of God. By looking at Him we see what God is really like. But, leaving this point of view aside for the moment, let us see what Jesus *taught* about God by *word of mouth*, quite apart from what he taught by His life. There is a remarkably good account of this in Mr. Glover's well-known book "The Jesus of History," and we shall not scruple to borrow from it.

To begin with, Jesus had the most *joyous* idea of God that was ever thought of. To Him the thought of God brought unalloyed delight and happiness. All His teaching about God centres round the great beauty of God, the nearness of God, the friendliness of God, and the joy of His companionship. God is altogether lovely and beautiful. If we take all the most beautiful aspects of human life, like fatherhood, friendship, patience, fidelity, kindness, and purity, and lift them up to the very best that we can imagine, then God is better than that. Jesus used His favourite *à fortiori* argument from the best in human nature. "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, *how much more* shall your Heavenly Father. . ."

And because God was all that is most beautiful which the heart of man can imagine, therefore it was a simple, natural, and inevitable thing to love Him. The Jewish commandments *commanded* a man to love God. Jesus would have said, "Once you know God as He really is you *cannot help* loving Him." To Him the really impossible thing would have been *not* to love Him. He spoke of Him to men as "your Heavenly Father." Whole volumes lie in that one expression which Jesus brought into the world. What a picture of God it conjures up in the mind! Thus Jesus was very glad of God because God is so altogether lovely.

One thing which made His thoughts of God so joyous was the sense of God's care. God, He taught, cares

about everybody and everything ; He cares about *you* in the first place. " The very hairs of your head are all numbered." He cares for the flowers, too, which are so short-lived, clothing the lilies of the field in garments of beauty, to which the glories of Solomon are as nothing. Even the common grass in the meadow He " clothes." He cares also for the little sparrows twittering in their nest, and, of course, for the children, " not willing that one of these little ones should perish." What is more, He cares for the *sinners* !—a thought which the religious people of His day found it hard to grasp. But there ! Jesus was quite certain about it, and He Himself went so much among the sinners because He was so sure that God cared for them, and did not want one of *them* to perish either. And so He drew a picture of God rejoicing more over the coming home of a sinner than over anything else—delighted and happy,like a man who has recovered a sheep which he had lost or a father getting his lad back home again, and so glad to have him. No one was out of the reach of the love of this Heavenly Father.

He would have us think of God's care as always there, watching over us—only we must not make the mistake of supposing that therefore none of the changes and chances of this mortal life will befall us. God cares for the grass of the field, but some of it will be cast into the oven ; He cares for the birds in their nest, but one day one of them will be missing, fallen to the ground. He cares for the children, but some of them bad men will cause to stumble ; but His care, His sympathy, His understanding, are there all the same. To those who believe *that*, troubles, suffering, distress, pain and loss will indeed come in this troublesome world, but the sense of God's care and sympathy will make all the difference. Jesus Himself ended His human life forsaken of all men, betrayed by His friend and dying by inches on His hideous Cross, but somehow He died glad and happy with the word " Father " on His lips. Even there He was not out of the care of His Heavenly Father. " He careth for you." Most of all, of course, when you are in trouble.

He does not *send* trouble, but He cares for you when it comes, and helps you through it.

There is no common concern, no matter of food or clothing, no mere detail of the ordinary round of common life and duty but God knows all about it and is interested in it. If it is something difficult and hard, then He is there waiting to lend a helping hand. If it is some heavy trouble, He is there, too, putting His hand on your shoulder and bidding you " be of good cheer." If it is something happy, He is there sharing in the joy of it and smiling about it. God is so very *friendly*, and men do not seem to know it.

It is Jesus' thoughts about God which explain everything about His own wonderful life and beautiful character.

What are *our* thoughts about God ? It is, of course, these thoughts which determine the character of our lives. We live painfully or joyously—downcast or full of cheerful courage—discontented or thankful—strong or weak—lonely or unforsaken according as we do or do not think of God as Jesus thought of Him. The most characteristic saying of Jesus, and the one oftenest on His lips was " Be of good cheer." He went about the world telling people to " cheer up " because God is there and everything is really all right if we only knew it. He believed firmly in the need which God and man have of each other, and to Him, the " good news " is when God and a man find each other and the man discovers what a good thing he has found.

XXV.—The Saving Doubt

The first chapter of Genesis brings us up against the riddle of the universe : " In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." How easy this would be to believe and how thankfully, lost in adoring wonder, would we embrace this great affirmation, if only that which is created were like the moon, and had only one of its faces always turned towards us, the smiling,

beautiful face which seems to be a standing witness to the loveliness of God.

Unfortunately, the universe has two faces. The sunset sky, the lilies of the field, the star-strewn heavens—that is one face. But, looking out from behind this fair countenance, is another face, which seems to grin at us like the hideous and obscene mask of a heathen idol, with jaws that drip blood. Nature, which can be so beautiful, is also "red in tooth and claw"; the shark, the cancer-germ, the pitiless storm and the earthquake, have also been created and made." There are also the appalling cruelties of human history; the long martyrdom of man.

Can both these faces belong to one and the same God? And, if not, which of the two is the true one? Is the right answer that given by "Mr. Blettsworthy?" * "For now," he says, "I had to square myself to live in a system of things that had neither benevolence nor purpose with regard to me. The mind wanders through the vast universe God has vacated. There is no kindly human God, no immanent humanity in this windy waste of space and time. That, it seems, we have all decided upon."

Probably all of us, save a favoured few, have had our moments when, baffled by the apparent cruelty and indifference of the universe we have felt like this. There are in the world so many ugly facts which seem well-nigh impossible to reconcile with the existence of "a kindly human God." Is it not easier to believe that no such Being exists? It looks like it. But just when Mr. Blettsworthy has come to this despairing but assured conclusion, there springs up in his mind a gigantic and disturbing doubt, the doubt whether, after all, his pessimistic conviction is anything like as certain as it seems.

He realises that this universe contains other facts beside these dark ones—facts of a quite different order which he has overlooked. And so we find him

* *Mr. Blettsworthy on Rampole Island*, by H. G. Wells. P. 256.

beginning to hesitate—thus: "And yet there is goodness: there is love that is better than ourselves. At times also there comes a quality upon things seen and things heard that lifts them, or seems to lift them, above pain, cruelty, stupidity, fear or discretion. There are certain moments of visible beauty, and there is something in great music that makes the captain at his vilest seem small and defeated. I, even I, poor thing that I am, have seen the world transfigured and know the glory of the vision. I am not at the end of my courage, and surely out of something good but altogether incomprehensible to me and altogether beyond me, that courage must come."

That's just it. Just when we're safest some far-darting gleam of intuition, shooting through the gloom and tangle of existence, comes to disturb our pessimistic conclusions about "a universe which God has vacated."

> "Just when we're safest there's a sunset touch,
> A fancy from a flower-bell, some one's death,
> A chorus-ending from Euripides—
> And that's enough for fifty hopes and fears
> To rap and knock and enter in our soul."

Here are two very great thinkers, Robert Browning and H. G. Wells; both of them men who have looked the ugly facts of the universe steadfastly in the face, and neither of them can escape the conviction that there are other facts to be taken into account before the last word about the riddle of the universe can be spoken. There is love, beauty, courage. There are spiritual facts so great, so good, so beautiful as to raise the doubt whether behind everything that is worst there must not be, after all, "Something good, infinitely beyond us," from whence these things must come.

It is at all events conceivable that the dark facts of the universe may be due to some transitory and accidental factor in the constitution of things, or to some awful and inexorable necessity, which we are utterly incapable of realising, but no such explanation will account for what is great and beautiful and good. Granted, for instance, that music is simply vibrations,

whence comes its spiritual quality, its sheer loveliness and beauty?

And above all there is this odd fact, that, behind all that is dark and ugly in this world, behind the evil which we can see so plainly, we live haunted, as it were, with a strange consciousness of something or some one else—a spirit, a mind which is light and love and beauty and courage, which is continually manifesting itself through the surrounding darkness and bringing to our souls strange visitings and intuitions of an underlying health and good cheer at the heart of things. We have an inexplicable sense of something good beyond us in the presence of which evil somehow seems to be defeated and dwarfed into insignificance. Something which covered the fields of death in Flanders with red poppies. What a hint!

Lastly (though we should have said "firstly") there is Jesus saying to us: "Be of good cheer." "Let not your heart be troubled." *There* comes the biggest doubt of all—that *He* could possibly have been mistaken; and in *His* soul was the unwavering certitude that goodness was supreme.

XXVI.—Fool-Wisdom

Early in the Sixteenth Century Erasmus published a book entitled, "In Praise of Folly," Sixteen hundred years earlier another Book had been published, which might have been given the same title; it was the New Testament, written to sing the praise of Folly.

It would hardly occur to any one to sing the praise of Foolishness. Erasmus did not do so. His book is purely sarcastic. But the New Testament really does sing the Praise of Folly, and asserts deliberately, that, if a man wishes to become wise, the first thing that he must do is to become a fool. This is one of those great paradoxes which you find so often in the New Testament; statements which appear at the first glance totally impossible, but which turn out to be the exact truth when you have thought sufficiently

about them. For instance, it really is true that if you wish to find your life you must first lose it, throw it away; it is also a fact that if you wish to reach the truest wisdom you must begin by becoming a fool.

For there is such a thing as divine folly, and the Kingdom of God stands open to every one who is willing to become a fool. It is bolted and barred against every one who is wise in his own conceits. This is because God's ways are not as our ways, nor His thoughts as our thoughts, and He has made foolishness the condition of entering His Kingdom. When you are dealing with worldly affairs, foolishness is, of course, fatal. The fool and the simpleton get left behind in the race for money and power and influence. But when you are dealing with the Kingdom of God, which is not of this world, things are exactly reversed; folly enters in, but cleverness never does.

Every year brings a fresh advance for mankind along the path of intellect and cleverness. He gets wiser and wiser in the wisdom of this world; his intellectual powers steadily increase. But what has it brought him? A greater command of the forces of Nature, more material prosperity and comfort, more power, more wealth, more efficiency. But has it brought him any more peace of heart, any more gladness; has it made his life any sweeter, has it met any of his deepest needs? "To be saved" in the language of the New Testament does not mean to go to Heaven when you die. It is an expression which has to do with this present life rather than with the next. It means to be made secure; to be delivered from evil; to walk in the midst of troubles and enjoy the peace of God; to live joyous and undismayed, cast down but never destroyed; to be sorrowful yet always rejoicing, to be captain of your soul, to dwell in a safe place. And the New Testament says that it is by foolishness that it has pleased God to save them that believe.

But to believe in this foolishness of God is just what the intellectual temper of the present day finds so difficult. To so many it really is foolishness and nothing more. They have never guessed that the only

real wisdom that there is in the world may lie behind it. We believe in thinking for ourselves; our problems, we say, will yield before the progress of modern thought. The old Gospel has ceased to convince us; it is foolishness in the light of present day knowledge.

We talk like this because, we do not, of course, know and understand our real needs. But it is just our needs which God *does* understand, and that is where His foolishness is wiser than the wisdom of men. St. Paul does not hesitate to speak about "the foolishness of God." He sees that the message which he brings about God will appear to be utter foolishness to a world which seeks after wisdom. It is so unintellectual. To ask men to believe that they will find God wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger—that a Galilean Peasant has the words which are spirit and are life; that His death on the Cross can have any conceivable effect on human sin or can bring forgiveness to a human soul; that behind a world, where everything seems to be awry and evil triumphant, all is really well—surely this is just foolishness!

Well, folly it may be; but strangely enough it works out right, and that makes it look suspiciously like wisdom, and, as a matter of solid fact, everything which is best in human life to-day has come about only through men having accepted this fool-wisdom of God as true wisdom. "Fool-wisdom," says George Mucklow in Mr. Vachell's book, "comes from God Almighty. It's what we read on in the Holy Book, the sart that God gives to His creeturs and to babes and sucklings. I've a notion that He'd guide us, if so be as we weren't so set on guiding ourselves."

Are we quite sure that there is not here a wisdom which is wiser than the wisdom of men? After all we have very great and real needs. What remedy have we to propose for them, if we reject this foolishness of God? Do we really know of anything which can deal with them adequately? It may be folly to let an unreasoning instinct of our heart over-rule the reasoning powers of our intellect, but what if, after all, it is the instinct of the heart which is right, and which

guides simple souls straight to safe dwelling-places just as the migrant bird is guided across trackless paths to its summer home? At the best we are but wayfaring men in a world where the road is very hard to find. We think we can find it ourselves by our own wisdom, and most of us lose our way through knowing too much. How would it be to become fools and let God guide us with His fool-wisdom which He gives to the unlearned and to babes? Perhaps George Mucklow is right, and may be God Almighty would guide us if so be that we weren't so set on guiding ourselves!

XXVII.—"The Things Which Are Unseen"

We have been keeping, here in Norfolk, the Dedication Festival of our little village church. We made it as gay as we could with flowers and mellow-tinted autumn foliage and we set the bells a-ringing. When the day's work was over and we had got our teas and had time to don our tidy clothes, we gathered within its walls for a service of Thanksgiving to God for our Parish Church and all that it means to us. We sang the Psalm "I was glad when they said unto me, We will go into the House of the Lord." We sang, too, "We love the place, O God." In our little service we made thankful remembrance of those by whose devotion, gifts, and labour our church was built for us some five hundred or more years ago; and, with the desire in our hearts to follow their good examples, we made our little thankoffering towards beautifying and adorning it and making it as worthy as we can of Him Whom we worship there.

Then, our service of praise and thanksgiving being ended, we adjourned to the neighbouring village school (for as yet we possess no Parish Hall), and there as one family, gave ourselves up to fellowship, merriment, and good cheer (of a frugal kind, it is true) until it was time for us all to go home to bed.

What does it stand for, this Parish Church of ours? Well, it stands for a great many very valuable things.

For help to fight manfully the battle of life, for comfort in times of tribulation, for the peace of God in our hearts, for fellowship one with another, for joy and gladness as we go on our way. But it stands also as an abiding witness to a great fact, the fact of man's need of God and of his incurable belief in " the things which are unseen." For, go where you will amongst mankind, north, south, east, west, wherever a handful of human beings have settled down as a community and made themselves homes, there in the midst of their dwelling-places you will find standing the Parish Church or something which corresponds to it.

Here in this England of ours, as you travel through its length and breadth, not a village but has its church spire or tower rising heavenwards above the roofs of the houses. It is always there. In distant lands it is the same : everywhere mankind builds for himself some kind of Temple or Mosque, or he has somewhere in the village a sacred spot set apart, a tree, a stone, a spring, which bears witness to his belief in an unseen world.

It is a fact of very deep significance to which it is worth paying serious attention. Man has never really found himself able to live by bread alone. When he has made provision for his every material need, when he has got for himself food and clothing and shelter, then he has still not got all that he needs, but he must go forth and begin to set up for himself a building which has nothing whatever to do with any of his material needs and serves no kind of material purpose in his life, which adds nothing to his earthly comfort or convenience, which brings him no kind of monetary gain, but rather the reverse, for its building and maintenance mean continual expense and sacrifice.

No other part of the creation does this thing ; no animal builds for itself any structure of this sort. And the reason is obvious. It is because, having found food and shelter and a place where it may lay its young, an animal is entirely unconscious of any further needs. But not so man. He remains unsatisfied. There is a part of him for which he feels he must make provision.

The part of him which he calls his soul—and his soul, he finds, "has a desire." He is a religious animal; incurably religious. He is conscious, without knowing why, of an unseen world without him and of spiritual desires within him, and it is this fact which differentiates and sets him apart from all the rest of creation.

It is not merely that he has a more highly developed brain than the highest of the animals. There he differs from them only in *degree*, in that he has a *larger* brain than theirs, and in this respect is merely a more highly developed animal. But in his apprehension of a spiritual world and in this impulse to reach out towards things which are unseen he differs from them in *kind*, and this desire of soul within him constitutes a great gulf fixed between him and the very highest of the animals, something which separates him from them *toto cœlo*. Whether or no he evolved from some ape-like creature in the dim past matters less than nothing. No ape ever built itself a Parish Church nor ever will; no ape ever felt the smallest desire to lift hands of prayer to its Maker, nor ever will; no ape was ever haunted with the desire for goodness nor ever cried "My soul is athirst for God, yea even for the living God."

But every Parish Church, every temple, every mosque, standing amidst the homes of mankind, proclaims his divine pedigree; proclaims that between him and the unseen world is some curious link, some strange affinity—proclaims that in a world of sense and sight and material things he can never quite manage to feel himself at home and at rest. There is something more that he still needs, and so, as one who feels himself a stranger and a pilgrim, who has here no continuing city, he builds this odd, inexplicable building, the Parish Church—odd and inexplicable altogether if there be no Reality whom we call God for Whom man's soul is thus strangely athirst, no things unseen in which alone his restless heart can rest.

PART II

THE SCRIPTURES

I.—The Bible

Never were the facilities for education so great as they are to-day. Information on every conceivable subject, supplied by first-rate scholars, is available in quite inexpensive books. And yet, in spite of this, vast numbers of people still seem to have no more intelligent conception of what the Bible is than one which regards it as a kind of magic book, each single word of which is an infallible oracle of God dictated directly by Him. Letters, pamphlets and books which reach one all reveal this fact. There must be people in this country to-day who solemnly believe that the Bible was dictated by God in Heaven, written in English (!) and sent down to earth, printed and bound ready for circulation. Of its long, devious and dubious history, of the existence of numberless divergent versions of it, of alternative readings of its text which runs into hundreds of thousands, they seem to have no idea.

Yet any scholar will tell you that until as late as 118 A.D. no one could have said definitely which books were part of the Old Testament and which were not; because, although popular tradition of the Jewish Church accepted certain books as "Scripture," it was not until that date that "The Canon" (i.e., the correct list of books which form the Old Testament) was authoritatively and finally settled at the Synod of Jamnia. Up to 118 A.D. The Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes and Esther were still "disputed" books, and could not have been quoted as being Holy Scripture.

In Our Lord's time at least, two separate versions of the Old Testament, *which differed widely from each other*, were in use. These were (1) the Hebrew Version, from which our English Authorised Version is ultimately derived, and (2) the Septuagint Version, which was a

Greek translation of the Old Testament made at Alexandria between 250 and 132 B.C. That the Septuagint translators had before them a Hebrew text which was not the same as the present authorised Hebrew (or Massoretic) text is obvious to anyone, for the Septuagint (apart from numberless verbal discrepancies) contains large omissions from and additions to the present Hebrew text.

At once the question arises, " Which of these two versions contains the correct text and represents ' the pure Word of God ' " ? They cannot *both* be right, where they differ. If the answer be given that the Hebrew text from which the Septuagint was translated is the wrong one, then you are met by the awkward fact that practically all the quotations which the New Testament writers make from the Old Testament *are taken from the Septuagint Version* ! These quotations would therefore be errors. If God actually verbally dictated the Bible, how did He come to be so clumsy as to dictate two versions of it which disagree with each other ? And why did He let St. Paul quote from the wrong one ?

When we come to the New Testament much the same facts are present. Up to as late as 397 A.D. no one could have said exactly what the New Testament was, because up to this date (when the Synod of Carthage finally fixed the Canon of the New Testament) at least five books were " disputed," viz., James ; Jude, ii. ; Peter, ii. and iii. ; John. Before that date you could not have quoted from these five books as being " Holy Scripture."

Therefore, both in the case of the Old Testament and of the New Testament, it was left to the Jewish and Christian Churches respectively to decide what was Scripture and what was not. But if the Bible contains the *ipsissima verba* of God dictated by Him, it ought never to have been open to doubt as to which were His words and which were not ; nor ought it to have been left to mere men to decide the point. Moreover, it strikes a good many people that the decision of the Jewish Church to include the Book of Esther and the

Song of Solomon in Holy Scripture, whilst it relegated such books as " Wisdom " and " Ecclesiasticus " to the Apocrypha, did not show much critical perception !

These are simple and well-known *facts* about the history of the Bible, and we may add to them the further fact that the oldest existing manuscript of the Old Testament is not earlier than 916 A.D., and the oldest manuscript of the New Testament not earlier than the Fourth Century. The manuscripts of the New Testament are more than one thousand five hundred in number, and in no two of them is the text exactly the same. These manuscripts were, of course, copied by hand, and if there is anyone capable of believing seriously that the copyists never made a slip nor a mistake they must be credulous indeed.

Seeing, therefore, that it is utterly impossible for anyone on earth to say what the exact original words of Holy Scripture were, it seems more than a little unwise to take isolated groups of words from the Bible and treat them as magic utterances straight from the lips of God. And when such " texts of Scripture " are quoted from *our English translation* (which contains many mistranslations of the original Hebrew and Greek), it is evident that it is still more impossible to claim infallibility for them.

We must at least do the Bible the honour of reading and using it *intelligently* and rationally. The only way to do this is, of course, to read it *as a whole*, and to treat it as a rational book, and not as a magic one. When read sensibly, it is found to contain, running throughout it, a message from God to man ; a message about God Himself, about right and wrong, about the unseen world, about human life and how to live it. As a book it is unique and its message beyond price : so much so that no one can safely neglect that message. The claim made for it that it is an inspired book needs no proving to anyone who will read it as a whole and open his heart to its message ; and about what " inspiration " really means there is something further to be said.

II.—Inspiration

The Christian Faith claims for the Bible that it is an "inspired" Book, but it does not therefore assert that every single word of it is an infallible utterance of God. The word "inspiration" means, of course, "in-breathing," and this at once gives us the clue that we want. You can only breathe into human beings. *Words* cannot be inspired, but *men* can. The most elementary common sense ought to lead us to see that it was the *writers* who were inspired and not the Book. The Bible itself nowhere claims that its individual words are inspired: it merely says that "all scripture is given by inspiration of God," and that "holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost."

Here, again, common sense ought to teach us that the one obvious way by which God's message could be brought to men was by the enlightenment of certain human minds with a knowledge of the truth which they could then pass on to others; and if God was going to employ human agents (as He most certainly did), the natural way in which to make use of them was, *not* by superseding their ordinary human powers and turning them into mere automatic penmen or machines, but by guiding, enlarging, and quickening their normal human understanding. Either to coerce their wills or to turn them into super-men would have been to proceed by freak methods instead of by rational ones. It would have meant degrading men from their position of free, intelligent beings down to the level of mere blind automata. One can scarcely doubt which method is the more true to all that we know of God's way of doing things. Only heathen gods employ magic: the true God never does.

Now the Bible is written from cover to cover by one nation—the Hebrews. Various nations have had certain peculiar gifts. The Greeks had a genius for philosophy and art; the Romans for law and government. The special endowment of the Hebrew nation was that of religious perception. It had a genius for

religion which makes it absolutely unique amongst all the nations of the world. Here, to start with, is something entirely credible, viz., that one particular nation should have been endowed with a genius for religious truth. This is in complete accordance with God's methods, and probably no one will wish to deny that this nation may be described as "inspired." They have, as a matter of fact, become the religious teachers of the world, and have bequeathed to it a Book which is the acknowledged standard text-book of religion.

There are exceedingly good grounds for regarding this nation as inspired, because they reached their knowledge of religious truth intuitively—*per saltum*. Their religious faith was in no sense the product of any process of reasoning, nor of philosophical argument, for they never produced a philosopher, just as they never produced an artist or a scientist. No adequate explanation of how they arrived at their knowledge of the truth about God can be given, other than that they did so *instinctively*—almost unconsciously.

The Bible, then, is written by men who had a "flair" for God, and it is obvious that men can possess this great faculty without necessarily possessing any scientific knowledge in advance of the current ideas of their own times. In order to produce an artist or a musician you do not need to make a man either a scientist or a mathematician. Neither need a theologian be endowed with special scientific knowledge. The writers of Holy Scripture therefore display exactly what we should expect them to display, viz., a deep knowledge of the things of God, accompanied by such scientific ideas as were current in their day. To look for scientific accuracy in the Bible is to approach it unintelligently. It is a text-book of *religion*: not a text-book of science. If Isaiah or the Psalmists or the Evangelists had been miraculously informed about wireless waves, this would have added nothing to their efficiency as teachers about God. A man who accepted the geocentric theory of the universe is just as capable of teaching me how to love and serve God as a man who has digested Einstein's writings. In fact, he is *more*

capable of doing so, because his mind is a simpler one, and the things of God which we need to know in order to live well are simple things.

Lastly, nobody can really be blind to the fact that some parts of the Bible are more valuable or, if you like, more inspired than others. The Bible of a devout Christian will be worn and marked at Isaiah, and the Psalms, and the Gospels, whilst the pages will be remarkably clean at Leviticus and Esther. This is because he is, quite unconsciously, a " Higher Critic," and finds by experience that some parts of the Bible have much more food for his soul in them than others. The first chapter of I. Chronicles consists exclusively of a list of Jewish names. Does anyone seriously believe that this chapter is on the same level of inspiration as Isaiah liii. or the Sermon on the Mount ? And did God really spend His time *dictating* this list of names which nobody ever dreams of reading ?

The truth is that the Bible is like a gold-mine, where the pure gold is mixed with much earth and clay, and has to be washed out and separated. This is just what the intelligent reader does. He extracts the gold ; and he finds that when he has done this, he has far more than enough precious metal to supply all his spiritual needs ten times over. He has more than enough truth to be " a lantern unto his feet and a light unto his paths to guide his feet into the way of peace." And it was to give this light upon the way of life that the Bible was written, and it gives it as no other book in the world does or can do. For through its pages, written by " holy men of God," God's Holy Spirit speaks to the hearts and consciences of men, and somehow, as they read, they become conscious that it is the voice of God to which they are listening.*

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* Read *The Inspiration and Authority of Holy Scripture,* by Dr. Monro Gibson. Published by Thomas Law, 1908.

III.—The New Testament (I).

Have we ever realised what an odd book the New Testament is? Considering that it is, of course, the basic and authoritative document of the Christian Faith, with so much depending upon it, nothing could very well be less like what we might have expected it to be.

To begin with, it is very short. It consists of a very brief and fragmentary account of some of the deeds and teachings of the Founder of this religion told four times over, but substantially the same account; of an equally fragmentary account of the doings of a few of His first disciples; of about twenty letters written by five of them, and of a kind of vision or "revelation." That is all. It forms a very small volume. Mahomet's Koran, on the other hand, runs to some five hundred or six hundred pages.

Then, again, it contains no single word written by the Founder of Christianity. Here again it stands in sharpest contrast with the Koran, every word of which is from the pen of Mahomet. That Jesus could read and and write is beyond question. He read the lesson in the Synagogue at Nazareth. He stooped down and wrote on the ground in the Temple court. But He left no writings behind Him. What we have was written by ten of His followers.

Moreover, nobody ever planned this book or took any steps to get it written. In a sense it wrote itself, for it is hardly too much to say that it was by a kind of afterthought, almost by accident, that it ever came to be written at all. The first word of it (I. Thessalonians) is almost certainly not earlier than 51 A.D., eighteen years after the Founder's death. The earliest Gospel (St. Mark) is probably not earlier than 69 A.D.—an interval of thirty-six years. The letters which it contains are genuine and natural correspondence, real ordinary letters. In one of them the writer asks his friend to whom he is writing to collect and bring to him a cloak and some books which he had left behind at Troas.

In another letter he asks a friend to make inquiries for lodgings for him. This is just the kind of thing to be found in the letters which we ourselves write. The writers of these letters had not, of course, the vaguest idea that they were writing what would one day become part of " The Bible." Being, for the most part, Jews, they would have been horrified at the idea (to them an almost sacrilegious one) that they were writing " the Word of God."

For over thirty years after His death no attempt whatever seems to have been made to write down the story and the words of Jesus. What has come down to us was preserved orally amongst the earliest Christian communities and handed down by tradition. It was not until the Apostles, who were the original witnesses of the life and words of Christ, began to be removed, one after the other, by death that anyone seems to have thought it necessary to record in writing the things concerning Jesus of Nazareth. When at last this work was taken in hand they produced something which does not even faintly resemble a proper biography. The details about Our Lord's life are of the scantiest. We do not even know what He looked like, except that He had deep and piercing eyes. The first thirty years of His life, which it would have been of the deepest interest to know about, are passed over in silence, except for one small incident when He was twelve years old. We know infinitely more of the personal history of Mahomet than we know of that of Christ. If we were to piece together everything which is told us about Him in the four Gospels the incidents recorded would not cover more than an aggregate total of three weeks or less out of the three years of His Ministry. What endless things He must have done and said of which we know nothing, and how much we wish that we had been told them.

Even such words of His as have been preserved have come down to us in a translation, for He spoke the native dialect of Palestine, the Aramaic, of which just a few fragments, such as " Talitha Cumi," have been preserved in the Gospels. Two languages further

apart in structure and thought than Aramaic and Greek it would be difficult to imagine, but a Greek translation is the nearest approach which we have to the original words of Jesus as they fell from His lips. Lastly (though much more could be said), this New Testament was never set forth with authority as the official document of the Christian religion. No decree of the Church established it. For long years it remained uncertain as to which books actually constituted the New Testament. All that can be said is that, just as it wrote itself, so it established itself by a general and unconscious consensus of Christian opinion which, by a kind of spiritual instinct, selected from a whole mass of literature those writings which were of intrinsic value; and the only authority which lies behind this Book is the authority which comes from the tacit agreement of Christian minds which, widely separated in time and space, finally reached the same conclusion as to the outstanding superiority of those writings which to-day form the New Testament.

Taking all these facts together, the Book is (we repeat) an extremely odd book for a book of this kind. It can only be described as almost casual, fortuitous, and accidental. The last thing in the world which it is, is a formal treatise on the Christian religion.

In the next chapter we will try to show that it is precisely this curious character which attaches to the New Testament which makes it of absolutely unique value as a religious document and forms the strongest ground for believing that it expresses like no other book in the world the real mind of God.

IV.—The New Testament (II)

We have tried to point out the odd and unexpected character of the New Testament, considered as the textbook of a great religion. The Founder left no instructions about it, and wrote not a word of it. Its very existence is, in a sense, an accident, or at least a kind of

afterthought. It is entirely informal and extremely incomplete in many respects. No one could possibly describe it as a deliberate treatise on the Christian religion. It had no editor. It just grew by a gradual process of collecting together the more or less stray writings of some of Our Lord's followers, all of whom wrote independently of each other, and with no idea or intention of producing a text-book of the Christian Faith.

Now our first thought is perhaps one of regret that it is as informal and as incomplete as it is. There is so much omitted about which we wish that we had been told. We think of all the bitter controversies which have raged round the Christian Faith over doctrines and points of Church order, above all over the sacraments. How much disunion and schism we might have been spared if only the New Testament had dealt with these matters in full and clear detail.

Yet it is precisely in this very indefiniteness that the wisdom of God is shown. A book which lays down precise rules, regulations and precedents, which prescribes and defines the ordinances of a religion is a book foredoomed to extinction. Because times change and circumstances alter, and the ways of one part of the world are not those of another, and so inevitably what is laid down in one century or in one part of the world becomes obsolete and unworkable in another. We have just had an extraordinarily good illustration of this fact in the matter of Prayer Book revision. How many of the rubrics of 1662 have become simply unworkable by the mere passing of time and are now dead letters? In another direction the ordinances of the Koran, being designed for Eastern people and Eastern conditions of life, have prevented it from ever gaining any kind of hold in the West; and, moreover, the East itself (take Turkey, at all events) has come to find that the book is obsolete and unworkable in these modern times, and it is in process of being discarded as a book which has remained stagnant. In course of time it will probably pass away altogether.

Meanwhile, the New Testament lives on, with its force unspent, through every change that the centuries bring. Its message addresses itself as much to the people of America, the newest country of the West, as to ancient India of the East, or to still more ancient China of the Far East. It has a meaning for primitive peoples in the savage parts of Africa. It adapts itself to every age and to every clime, and is as fresh to-day as on the day when it was first written. So far from growing old, it steadily acquires fresh vitality. Why? Because, instead of laying down ordinances and precedents, it expresses great and eternal *principles* which can never change, no matter how much human life may change. Just because it never was written as a formal treatise on the Christian Faith, but was written, as it were, haphazard, it reflects just simply and naturally, as in a mirror (and therefore all unconsciously), the great principles and ideas and beliefs by which the earliest followers of Jesus shaped their lives and conduct. They are the ideas and principles without which human civilisation cannot really endure.

We may be thankful that it has come to us, as it has, by an entirely *natural* process; and those of us who are learning to see the hand of God most clearly in that which is in harmony with the rest of the natural order rather than in that which is extraordinary and unusual, will see His hand most plainly here. He has let the faith and the truth which was sown in the hearts of men by Christ the great Sower express itself naturally in what they try to tell us of Him; in their fragmentary accounts of their lives and doings; in the letters which they wrote spontaneously to each other; and the result is something living and eternal, which is of unique and unalterable importance to the entire world.

It is because, through fragmentary and miscellaneous writings of this kind, they have so signally succeeded in expressing just those things which are so vital to the life of the world, that one is forced to see that unconscious inspiration which comes only from God. Many of us, reading our New Testament, find it utterly impossible to escape the conviction that through its

pages we are brought into touch with the mind of God. This fact seems almost self-evident : one has merely to read in order to be convinced.

But there is one other point arising from this unusual character of the New Testament, which is this. We have described the writing of it as " an afterthought." That is exactly what it was, because Christianity has never been founded on a *book*. To suppose that the Bible, or even the New Testament, is the basis of Christianity is a profound mistake. The Christian Faith existed and was in vigorous operation in the world for well-nigh a hundred years before the time when the New Testament (as we know it to-day) was completed. For at least thirty years the Church lived and spread without any book of its own at all. It did so because its basis was a *Person* and not a book. The book, when at last it did come to be written, was merely secondary, and has remained so ever since. At most it contains the somewhat fragmentary record of *the experience* which Christ's followers made of *Him* as Lord and Saviour. Their record and testimony eventually they wrote down, and we call it " the New Testament " ; but *it was on their personal experience of Christ that they lived*, and it is about this experience that the New Testament tells us.*

V.—The Gospels

However much in these days people may neglect the Bible as a whole, it is a pity that they do not at least read the Gospels, because this is the simplest and most obvious way of making the personal acquaintance of Christ. Amidst all the confusion in religious ideas at the present time, and in spite of a widespread abstention from organised religion, one does seem to discern a

* An extraordinarily clear and informing book about the New Testament is *Problems of the New Testament To-day*, by R. H. Malden (published by Humphrey Milford, Oxford University Press, 3s. 6d.). The writer acknowledges his indebtedness to this book and would like to commend it to others.

steadily increasing and deepening interest in Christ Himself, and it is probable that thousands who never go to church nor make any outward profession of religion are feeling themselves strangely drawn towards Him.

But one wonders how many of those who, to a greater or less degree, feel the pull of Christ have any real first-hand personal acquaintanceship with Him.

Now the peculiar value of the Gospels lies in the fact (which we have already mentioned) that they are not biographies but *portraits*, and they offer us what can only be described as a *living* portrait which is entirely unique of its kind.

Let us call in the help of Erasmus. When he published his Greek New Testament in 1516, he wrote about the Gospels as follows : " The writings of other men are such that the labour which we have expended in reading them will have been matter for no little regret. But happy is the man upon whom death lays his hand whilst pondering *these* pages. For here we have given to us the *living* portrait of that most holy Mind ; and Christ Himself, speaking, healing, dying, rising—in a word Christ in all His fulness is made to us so living, real, and vivid that, did you actually stand face to face with Him, you could not see Him more clearly than you do in these pages."

Now these are great and true words. There is in fact, if we may use the word with most reverent meaning, an *uncanny* power about the Gospels. They are not merely narratives about Christ's life and work and teaching, but, in some indefinable way, Christ so *lives* in them that the results of an earnest-minded and devout reading of them is not simply to give us information about Him, but to bring us actually to know Him personally. There are many people in the world to-day who can tell us that this is definitely so ; people who, through simply having read the Gospels, have been so brought into direct personal touch with Christ that their whole lives have been changed by this experience.

One cannot think of a biography of any of the

great characters of the world of which this can be said. The reading of a really good biography does leave us with a very great deal of knowledge about the personality and mind of the man whose life it portrays, but we could not say that any biography we ever read had so influenced us that we had become the personal life-long friends of the subject of it, and had added him to the list of our *living* acquaintances. But the Gospels have done this thing over and over again. They have converted men and women to Christ without the help of any agency other than themselves. It is a phenomenon that is worth seriously thinking about.

What gives them this unique character and power to which there is no parallel anywhere? Is there, after all, something in them which is not in any other writings in the world? If this is so, may not the answer be that they are portraits of Someone Who really does still live and Who is no mere historical Figure of the past, now dead and gone, and Who for this reason is able to impress His living Personality upon the hearts and minds of those who turn to these pages with a real desire to know Him? It looks as if this were so. In any case, it is difficult to think of any other really adequate explanation.

One of the most useful things that could be done at the present time would be to publish the Four Gospels as a separate volume, attractively bound and at a popular price. They should be given in a translation which, beyond replacing words which have entirely changed their meaning since 1611, should preserve to the utmost extent possible the stately and magnificent English of the Authorised Version, which suits the atmosphere of the Gospels as nothing else ever can. The Revised Version is pedantic in its language and unattractive in its appearance. Attempts which have been made to turn the Gospels into modern English merely vulgarise them, set one's teeth on edge, and utterly destroy their devotional atmosphere.

What we want is the Authorised Version, freed

from actual mistranslations and words which are misleading. These volumes should be printed without any division into verses, and certainly not in columns. They need to be made as much like any other ordinary book as they possibly can; a book which a person would pick up and read straight through in the same way as he would read a novel.

The Bible is still nearly always printed in a most unattractive and really rather stupid way, which puts people off and leads them to think it is not a real book. Make the Gospels look like any other book which people buy to read, and they will probably buy them and read them. In this shape they ought to be on every railway bookstall, where they would probably be bought freely. This is just what is wanted more than anything else, because, through the Gospels, Christ can preach Himself to people so much better than anyone else can preach Him; but we must give the Gospels a chance of coming into people's hands, which they do not seem to have at present.

VI.—Christ's Words

"Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away."

It is easy to say this sort of thing: the difficulty is to make it good. Any chance bystander who had heard this tremendous assertion fall from the lips of Christ, and had noted His unpretentious and humble appearance, would assuredly have smiled to himself, and concluded that the Nazarene Carpenter had lost His head altogether.

"What an absurd boast! What pathetic nonsense!"

All the same, he would have been wrong. To-day, after nearly two thousand years, the words of Christ have not passed away. They are familiar to more people in the world than the words of any person who ever lived; and, so far from passing away, every year that goes by only adds enormously to the impossibility of this ever happening.

In commercial language, the New Testament remains the world's "best seller," and probably no thinking man could be found prepared to deny seriously that ultimately, on its own merits, it must inevitably establish its unquestioned supremacy as the only really possible religious guide from one end of the world to the other. It has no rival that can for one moment compete with it. It owes this supremacy to the fact that it contains the words of Christ.

There is, of course, only one reason why a book can continue through the centuries to be in ever-increasing demand. It is because the consensus of mankind has instinctively judged it to be of supreme and unrivalled value. What, then, is the peculiar quality belonging to the Words of Christ which make it practically impossible that they will ever pass away?

In the first place, His words are altogether unique. What is true of the Character portrayed in the Gospels is equally (or even to a greater extent) true of the words attributed to that Character. From the point of view of entire originality nothing in the least like Christ's words exists anywhere else. They bear the impress of a mind which is so unique in its methods of thought, and, above all, of expression, that, if by some chance an ancient manuscript should be unearthed which purported to contain some unrecorded words of His, we should have no difficulty whatever in deciding whether they really were His words or not. Nobody else's words could possibly be mistaken for His.

"Never man spake like this Man spake" is the accurate verdict, not only of His contemporaries who listened to Him, but also of all impartial readers of the Gospels. The uniqueness of His style (if we may use that expression) consists in the setting forth of values which are rooted in eternity in language which is so simple and homely that a child can understand it, and which has in it the quality of great poetry.

Then, again, as we listen to His words, we become conscious of an authority lying behind them which

we find it impossible to dispute. People in Galilee noted this fact, and said that "He taught with authority." It is noteworthy that Christ never expresses a mere opinion. He never says "I think" or "I believe," but "I say unto you." He simply assumes that the truth of what He is saying is unquestionable. Where others are only guessing, He speaks as One who *knows*—knows absolutely with a knowledge which is complete and final, like the knowledge of God. Indeed, it is almost impossible to resist the conviction that it is the Voice of God to which we are listening, for the general conscience of mankind has felt that from what He says there really is no appeal.

To maintain that any religious teacher exists anywhere who could be styled His equal would be grotesque. His words cannot be gainsaid. For this reason, although Christian theology and dogma and the teaching of the Church have been criticised repeatedly, no one has ever seriously ventured to criticise the teaching of Christ Himself in the sense of asserting that He was mistaken.

People have said that it was too hard for them to accept, but they have never said that Christ was wrong. Our conscience finds itself forced to consent to what He says as being the truth, however little we may be prepared to act upon it. We have, as a matter of fact, never made any serious attempt to act upon the basis of the belief that Christ is unreservedly right, but is there anyone who really doubts that, if this were actually done, we should see the Kingdom of God beginning to appear upon earth ?

And once again, His words have never passed away in the sense that they have never grown old or become out of date. His teaching has the quality of timelessness. Science has to be continually revising its teaching to bring it up to date. Its statements have to be abandoned to be replaced by new ones. Einstein supersedes Newton ; Eddington questions Einstein. Systems of philosophy succeed one another, and have to be altered as the field of human knowledge

is enlarged. No one has ever had to revise the words of Jesus Christ to bring them up to date.

They were spoken two thousand years ago. Since then the whole face of human life has been altered beyond recognition, but we have still not outgrown His teaching, because the principles which He laid down are valid for all time; they are eternal; they are final. It is impossible to conceive of any fresh spiritual teaching which should go beyond and supersede what He says. He has spoken the last word.

So far is He from being superseded that we have not yet really fathomed, much less exhausted, what He has to say. At times it seems as if we had hardly begun to explore it. "We shall never understand," says Mr. Glover, "the last nineteen centuries; we shall not have our full equipment for facing the future if He is left by us on one side. We have to understand Jesus Christ, unless our universe is to be chaos."

"Lord, to whom should we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life."

PART III

JESUS CHRIST AND SOME OF HIS TEACHING

I.—The Commandments of Christ

At the east end of Dickleburgh Parish Church (on either side of the altar) there are two painted boards, upon which are inscribed the Ten Commandments. They have been placed there in obedience to the eighty-second Canon, which enjoins that "the Ten Commandments be set up at the East End of every Church, where the people may best see and read the same."

From the point of view of being able "to see and read" them, they could scarcely have been put in a worse place, for they are so far distant from the general congregation that field-glasses would be needed to read them! But let that pass. There they are; and by all means let them remain upon the walls of our churches. They make an excellent foundation for moral conduct of an elementary kind. They teach the fear of God, filial piety, honesty, truthfulness, and so forth. But do let us remember that they are not the Commandments of Christ.

He said that "not one jot or tittle of them should pass away," and that He "had not come to destroy them"; but He also taught plainly that they were not enough. He said that He "had come to fulfil them"; by which He meant that He had come to amplify them—to fill them out to their full extent; and He unhesitatingly claimed for Himself the right to supersede their authority and teaching by His own authority and teaching:—"It was said to them of old time . . . but I say unto you."

It ought therefore to be unnecessary to point out that the standard for a Christian is not the standard laid down by Moses, but the standard laid down by Christ, and that the Commandments which a Christian has to keep are Christ's Commandments. Yet probably

seventy-five per cent. of people accept the Commandments of Moses as a substitute for the Commandments of Christ, and it is the Decalogue which constitutes the average Englishman's code of morality.

It is not his fault, for he has been brought up on the Ten Commandments. They form one of the main planks of the Church Catechism; he sees them written on the walls of the Parish Church; they are read to him at Holy Communion, and he can scarcely be blamed if he comes to believe that they contain the whole duty of man and represent the standard of a Christian life. Only occasionally, in a sermon, does anyone speak to him about the Commandments of *Christ*. So he goes his way, quite honestly believing that if he does not commit murder, nor adultery, does not steal and does not bear false witness, he is living a Christian life.

He is taught that Christianity consists in not doing certain things. For, with one exception (the fifth), every one of the Ten Commandments is purely negative. Strictly speaking, they are not Ten Commandments at all. They are nine prohibitions and one commandment.

Now prohibitions are the best thing to give to a primitive people, such as the ancient Israelites. You must begin by teaching them "Thou shalt not," just as you do with children—"Don't fidget"—"Don't touch"—"Don't play with the matches." This is the way in which a child gets its first lessons in right conduct. But the time comes when saying "Don't" ceases to be an adequate way of training its character, and you must begin to point out graces and virtues to be acquired and spiritual triumphs to be achieved.

And this is why the Ten Commandments, though excellent as an elementary lesson in moral conduct, are wholly inadequate as a final standard. They speak plainly about evil, but they do not speak plainly about good. They speak of sins to avoid, but they say nothing about virtues to aim at. They tell you what you must not do, but they do not tell you what you ought to do.

They are notice-boards set up to warn people where danger lurks: they are not signposts pointing the way to the City of God which lies beyond the crest of the hill. They lack entirely any vivid picture of purity, goodness, spiritual achievement, self-sacrifice, and open-hearted love, which are the foundations of beautiful character. They represent goodness as being something purely negative; whereas, of course, it is something positive—the pursuit of an ideal.

To achieve goodness you need to have before your eyes a definite image of what goodness is, and not merely a definite image of evil; and the result of being taught only what you must not do is the production of characters which are purely negative, so that people are content to spend their lives trying to avoid the puddles of sin instead of setting their faces to scale the heights.

For this reason what we need to have taught to us are the Commandments of Christ which are, all of them, positive Commandments, telling us the things which we ought to get up and do; calling upon us for effort and action; painting for us definite images of what goodness really is; setting it before us as a goal to reach.

"Love your enemies"—"Do good to them that hate you"—"Forgive and ye shall be forgiven"—"Give to him that asketh of thee"—"Go with him twain"—"Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness"—"Let not your right hand know what your left hand doeth"—"Take my yoke upon you and learn of Me"—"Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel"—"Do this in remembrance of Me." These are the commandments that we need to hear and which surely should be read to us at His own Service, the Breaking of Bread.

If you set before people nothing but prohibitions, you must expect that the time will come when they will begin to question them. That is what is happening now. People are saying: "Why shouldn't I?" If they had been taught always the Commandments of Christ, with their ideal of the beauty of goodness to aim at, such questions would simply fall to the ground.

II.—"Going One Better"

In the Gospels we hear Our Lord telling His disciples that, unless they can be better people than the Scribes and Pharisees, they cannot possibly be reckoned as belonging to the Kingdom. It is worth trying to understand what He meant.

It would be a mistake to suppose that the Pharisees were not good people. On the contrary, they were the "unco' guid" people of Palestine, the Puritans of those days. They were commonly accepted as the standard pattern of goodness. A Pharisee was a man whose whole aim in life was to keep perfectly the Ten Commandments and all the other ordinances and traditions which constituted "The Law" of God. So he kept the Sabbath, went to Synagogue, paid his Church Due, fasted twice a week, and observed scrupulously to three places of decimals all the rules about meals and ceremonial washings.

Those who did this perfectly were said to be "righteous," i.e., acceptable and pleasing to God. And so every one looked up to the Pharisee as the model of what constituted a really good man—everybody except Jesus, who said bluntly that though they might be "righteous," they were certainly not *good*, at least not as God understands goodness. Needless to say, they did not like Him saying this kind of thing and quite openly hated Him. But Jesus was quite right, because we can see for ourselves that in spite of all their scrupulous keeping of the Commandments, they were not really nice people, but had quite unlovely characters.

You never heard of anybody liking the Pharisees. There was so very little about them to like. They were intensely religious and moral, but they were also narrow-minded, bigoted, and self-righteous, despising others, and they loved the praise of men and hated the truth when it clashed with their ingrained habits of mind. Evidently keeping the Commandments does not necessarily make you a nice person to live with!

So Jesus pointed out to His disciples that keeping the Law is not the same thing as being good. It is not enough. You have got to do better than that, because it is possible to keep all the Commandments and yet not be the least little bit like what God wants you to be. Something very much more is needed, and what this "something more" is Our Lord sets forth in the Sermon on the Mount. And here, in teaching His disciples, He started from an entirely fresh point. The Pharisee said, "The great thing is to keep the Commandments." Jesus said, "No, the great thing is to have a lovely character," and what we have in the Sermon on the Mount is Christ's description of the *kind of character* at which His disciples are to aim. Instead of giving them commandments and ordinances to keep, He describes to them the kind of *spirit* or *temper of mind* that is to be in them. He tells them that what you *are* matters so much more than what you *do*, and this is the key to understanding the Sermon on the Mount.

They are, He says, to try to *be* poor in spirit, meek, pure in heart, peace-loving, and merciful. They are to be the *kind of people* who are ready to hand their cloak to the man who has just taken away their coat and to go two miles when they were only told to go one. They are to turn the other cheek to the person who has hit them in the face, and to be known as people who will simply love to do a good turn (if they get the chance) to the fellow who treated them so badly last week. They are to be willing to lend, hoping for nothing again, and to be very secret about their goodness, not letting their left hand know what their right hand is doing. They are to be ready to forgive anybody anything.

It is a very beautiful and lovable character which Jesus depicts. If people were really like that, we should just have to love them with our whole heart, even as we feel that we have to love Our Lord with our whole heart because He actually *was* like that; for it is, of course His own lovely character which He has drawn for us here. And it is by having this kind

of character, as contrasted with the character exhibited by the religious Pharisee, that His disciples will be known.

Now, we have had Christianity in this country for nearly two thousand years, and one of the results of this is that the word " Christian " has almost entirely lost its real and distinctive meaning as defined by Jesus. A standard of character has come to be commonly accepted as the Christian standard, which is not really Christian at all or even beginning to be Christian. We have got back again to " the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees " ; that is to say, that to be moral and respectable is assumed to be the same thing as being *good* and being a disciple of Our Lord.

But, according to Jesus, Christianity *begins* where the Ten Commandments leave off. To keep the Ten Commandments is not really a very difficult matter. It is, after all, no more than the standard set up for a primitive tribe of Semites several thousand years ago. In saying this one is not depreciating the Ten Commandments ; they are the foundation of moral conduct, and, as Jesus Himself said, indispensable. *But they are not enough.* They set up at best only a *minimum* standard of decent conduct.

But Christian character aims at the maximum ; it has got to " exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees," i.e., go a long way further than mere moral correctness. Thousands of people to-day who do not steal, nor commit adultery, nor tell lies, are described as " Christian," but if this is our whole standard of goodness, Our Lord would not recognise us as His disciples. We have got to " go one better than that," and a very big one better before He would reckon us as belonging to the Kingdom. It is just this *really Christian character* which He describes which the world, of course, so sorely needs to-day.

III.—Motives

We have been thinking about the contrast between the moral righteousness of a Pharisee and Christian *goodness* as defined by Our Lord. Now, character is always the outcome of creed, which is the reason why it *does* matter what you believe. A man's life and actions are really determined by his attitude towards God more than by anything else.

Thus the character of the Pharisee was directly due to his conception of God, and that conception was something like this. He thought of God as the law-giver ; as a very great and very exacting celestial monarch. The road to His favour was by showing enormous zeal in the keeping of the Commandments which He had given. His Law must be obeyed to the last jot and tittle. The Pharisee therefore served God in the sweat of his brow. He laboured day and night to fulfil His requirements, and his religious life was really a kind of slavery, although he did not necessarily think of it as being this, for, in his own way, he took pleasure in feeling that he was keeping God's commandments. We must be fair to him. He had a kind of love for God's Law, as you can see by reading the 119th Psalm, and this was so far something good in him.

Obedience, even if it is only slavish obedience, is a virtue. But, unfortunately, results sprang from it which were disastrous to his character. The more perfectly he kept God's Law, the more pleased he became with himself and the more sorry did he feel for those unhappy people who were not keeping it as well as he was. In other words, he became self-righteous, despised others, and thanked God that he was not as other men are.

He made the mistake of thinking that his zeal for God's Law should be shown as publicly as possible as an example to others, and therefore he stood praying in the corners of the streets, wore an enormous

phylactery on his forehead, and had a trumpet sounded before him when he did his alms. Jesus therefore described him as a "hypocrite," which means "an actor," for he was always posing and unconsciously saying to people, "Look at me."

He did it all in the hope of a great reward. Keeping God's Law perfectly would give him, he believed, a claim upon God, which God would not be able to ignore, and the reward for his zeal would be a place in "Abraham's bosom" hereafter. There he would be amongst "the just." So he certainly did not serve God for naught. These facts about him effectually prevented him from being a good man. Just those qualities which God loves most and which would have made him a good man—viz., humility, modesty, and single-mindedness—were conspicuous by their absence, and his failure to be really good was due ultimately to his having a wrong idea of God to start with. His *motives* were all wrong.

Then came Jesus, and at one stroke altered the whole basis and motive of a religious life by giving men an entirely new and different idea of God. "God," He said, "is your Father: you are His children. He is a very beautiful Father, and what you have got to do is to try to live as nearly as possible like those who *really are children of God*. You must therefore manifest the family likeness in your characters and make yourselves as much like your Father in Heaven as you can."

Our Lord taught, for instance, that the reason why you are to love your enemies and do good to them which despitefully use you is because this is the sort of thing that God Himself does, and that by doing likewise you will show yourselves to be "the children of your Father which is in Heaven, for He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust." For the same reason you are to forgive, because this is what God does, and be merciful "as your Father also is merciful."

It is obvious how this teaching of Jesus entirely

alters the whole outlook. It calls men from living in a kind of painful and laborious slavery to a task-master to live in glad and joyous fellowship with a Father Who wants to see His children as beautiful in character as He is Himself. The idea of imitation is substituted for the idea of servitude, and it is only when people have first got these ideas of Jesus about God firmly into their minds that they can begin to develop and display Christian character and conduct.

It is when a man has seen in his soul the beauty of God and has come to love Him with his whole heart, that he will start giving away his cloak to the person who has taken his coat, and will go two miles where he was only asked to go one; and he will do this kind of thing because that is what children of God *do* do. What is more, he will find the most enormous delight and happiness in doing whatever he thinks God really wants him to do, because his motive all the way through is love. If you are merely serving a task-master, you will do what you *have to do* and no more, but you can never do enough for some one whom you *love*.

Now, what the world is crying out for is people who will shape their lives and their conduct towards their fellow-men on *Christian* principles, i.e., on the teaching of Jesus. It is not enough to have people who merely keep the Ten Commandments, but we want more people in the world who, instead of being content to ask themselves, "What are the things which I must *not* do, because God has forbidden them?" will ask themselves instead, "What are the things that God wants to see me doing: what kind of conduct on my part will show that I belong to the Family of God?" There is nothing less than a whole world of difference between these two attitudes of mind. The one man will do just as much as he ought to and be *moral:* the other will never be content till he feels that he has acted as nearly as possible as God would have done. The one will do right for *fear* of God; the other will *act beautifully* for *love* of Him. What a different world we should have if people would *love*

God and set out to live in fellowship with Him and never be content till they felt that they had acted in what was the *God-like* way to act. Why can not we try to do this?

IV.—Coat and Cloke

Ask almost anyone what they think of the Sermon on the Mount, and they will tell you that its teaching is very beautiful, and that it holds up a magnificent ideal of conduct. Press them, however, a little further, and you will almost certainly discover that in their opinion any attempt to put this teaching of Our Lord into actual practice must be abandoned as hopeless. "It simply can't be done," they will say. "It's not practical politics." There must be thousands of people who have a conviction that Our Lord is the world's greatest teacher—the Light of the World—but that there is some of His teaching which need not be taken too seriously. It is merely a beautiful ideal, not really meant for the rough and tumble of everyday life.

But He was, of course, incapable of saying anything which was not meant in deadly earnest or anything which He had not thought out deeply. He never indulged in pious platitudes nor expressed what were merely pretty thoughts. Behind what He says there is always some great fundamental and unalterable law of the spiritual world which *He knows to be true.* The mistake which we make is to assume somewhat airily that what he says cannot be done. But have we ever seriously attempted to do it? It has been said over and over again that "Christianity has never yet really been tried," which is perfectly true. Why not give it a trial and see what happens?

Let us take that saying of His that "if any man will sue thee at law and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also." At once some one says, "Do you seriously mean to say that if a man wants to take my coat away from me, I am simply to smile at him

and say, ' My dear fellow, here you are, have the waistcoat too ' ? "

Well, why not ? It is really the only sensible thing to do. What else *is* there to do ? If you get angry you merely damage your own soul. If you determine to get even with the fellow you only damage your soul still more. In any case, you bring yourself down to the level of this grasping person directly you proceed to fight him with his own weapons. You make yourself no better than he is. But surely the great thing is just precisely *to be better than he is*. Directly you show that you can behave better than he can, you have won all along the line. *He* is only a man who can sue you for your coat ; and any one can do that sort of thing. But *you* are a man who can hand him your waistcoat when he has just taken your coat ! What is he going to do with you ? You have " beaten him all ends up." The most immediate result is that you have made him look a quite extraordinary fool. It is conceivable that you may also make him feel secretly ashamed of himself, and even sorry to think that he has been such a mean and grasping fellow. By following Jesus's advice you may, in short, make him a better man, if only by showing him that there is some one in the world who can behave better than he can ; and if your quite beautiful and lovely conduct results in making him a better man, you have at least done something worth doing.

If you ever happen to meet the Archdeacon of St. Albans ask him to tell you about a man whom he met in the train somewhere in Hertfordshire and who said, " I'm going to R—— to tell a man there that I'm sorry and I'm going to thank him. I was hard up and out of work, and I pinched his bike. And what do you think he did to me ? He sent me £5 to help me to make a fresh start when I came out of prison. I came out this morning, and the first thing I'm doing is to go to R—— to tell that man I'm sorry."

Is not Jesus right ? What else would you expect Him to be ? And when we say that it is not practical politics to give £5 to the man who has stolen your

bicycle, and that He did not mean us literally to do this sort of thing, we are just talking nonsense and making a welcome excuse for ourselves because we have not the courage to do what Our Lord tells us to do.

On the other hand, suppose that you *do* do what Jesus recommends, the balance-sheet works out as follows: Net loss, one waistcoat (for you would have lost the coat in any case); net gain, having shown yourself to be one of the children of your Father which is in Heaven; having sweetened the world by a piece of quite beautiful conduct; having left upon your own character a very big mark for good which can never really be effaced; having taught some one else that there is a better way of doing than merely taking things away from your neighbour; and lastly, that inner joy which no man taketh from you of having done exactly what Christ would have done in your place.

A gain like this is obviously a much greater gain than making, say, £100. Our Lord always taught that spiritual gain is a much greater thing than material gain, and that character is the only true wealth that a man can amass. This is just what this materialistic age is too blind to see. None the less, Our Lord is, of course, right. Many a man over making £100 has lost his own soul, whereas if you hand your waistcoat to the man who has taken away your coat, you "gain your own soul" (to use His expressive phrase), and it is worth while, is it not, to lose a waistcoat or £5, or something, in order to gain your own soul, and, very possibly, the *soul of the man who took away your coat*?

V.—Christ's Look

The Gospels, we said, make no attempt at a complete account of Our Lord's life. They give us at most a series of impressions or sketches of the Master as He was remembered by His disciples. What they have

left us is not a biography but a portrait. This portrait they have drawn with such amazing success that it is the most vivid portrait in the world's literature. But, in drawing it, they have given us no indication whatever as to His personal appearance. We do not know whether He was tall or short, dark or fair, nor what His features were like. But they do refer more than once to just one personal trait. They tell us about His way of *looking* at people. This at once suggests that there must have been something arresting about His eyes ; they must have been deep and piercing, His soul looking out of them. When we remember that the portrait which they were drawing was not an outward, but an inward one ; not a portrait of His appearance but of His character and personality, it is not surprising that they have told us about His eyes, for the way in which a man looks at people is, above all, indicative of his character. So His look was one of the things about Him which was vividly remembered.

Now the Christian religion to those who really understand it is essentially a personal relationship to Jesus of Nazareth. It is not merely a question of studying His teaching nor even of following His example. It contains both these things, but it is more than either or both of them. It means dealing with Him personally as Lord and Master at every point and at every moment. And for those whose religion is of this kind it is impossible to escape the thought that at all times they are beneath His eyes, so that (as the late Bishop Moule, of Durham, used to say) " If you want to sin you must find a moment when He is not looking at you, and be quick and do it then."

Now there are three instances in the Gospels where His looking at people is recorded.

The first is in the synagogue at Capernaum, when, on the Sabbath day, He healed the man with the withered hand. When the Scribes and Pharisees objected to His healing a man on the Sabbath, " He looked round about on them with anger, being grieved

for the hardness of their hearts." They were good, respectable people and Churchgoers upon whom He thus looked with anger, and one pictures that in the flash of those eyes of His at that moment there must have been a look that scorched and withered. Their "hardness of heart" was not, of course, what we generally mean by hard-heartedness or callousness to suffering, but it was the hardness of heart which consists in wilfully blinding your eyes to the truth and deliberately refusing to admit that a thing is right because it happens to cut across some deep-rooted prejudice or obstinate habit of mere blind conservatism. It is the hatred of a truth which "we do not like." It is one of the worst sins that we can commit. It roused our Lord's righteous anger and indignation. We shall do well to remember that this sin of refusing to accept new truth is one to which religious people have been peculiarly liable at all times, and, when we thus harden our hearts and obstruct reform or oppose Overseas missions, may it not be the case that Someone is "looking round on us with anger, being grieved at us"?

The second instance is that of poor S. Peter, who loved Him so much and so sincerely. He was in the judgment hall, swearing that he had never set eyes on Jesus of Nazareth and did not know Him. And "the Lord turned and looked upon Peter." This time it must have been a different kind of look. One pictures those eyes full of a look of pained surprise mingled with sorrow, and lit with tender affection for this disciple of His who was so grievously failing Him at a crucial moment. And so again, when we deny Him before men, hide our principles and fail to show our true colours and remain tongue-tied when we ought to speak; when, in short, through cowardice or weakness we act as those who "know not the Man"—well, then we must think of Him as turning and looking upon us with that same look which broke Peter's heart and sent him out to sob in the dark porch. That look of Jesus must have been something which he remembered to his dying day.

And the third instance was that of the Rich Young Ruler of whom we are told that Jesus, looking at him, loved him. It is true that he failed at the crucial test and "made the great refusal," but there was something in him which made Jesus love him. Perhaps it was his earnestness and sincerity, his real desire to find the way of life and to follow it. Probably it was true enough that from his youth up he had kept the Commandments; he was really trying to live near to God. And yet—just one thing he lacked; and there must have been a wistful look in Jesus's eyes as they followed this pathetic figure receding down the road with slow steps and bent head, going away very sorrowful because he could not find the courage to take this last step, which Jesus asked of him. Perhaps, as He watched him go, Our Lord was thinking "the little more and how much it is; the little less, and what miles away." And so perhaps there are some of us of whom it is true that Jesus, looking at us, loves us. There is so much that He can find in us to love—a certain earnestness and a longing to be good men and good women; a real endeavour to do what is right. But still it is just a little wistfully that He looks at us. Just one step more that we need to take—one habit to give up—one sin to master, one more effort that we need to make and we too should find the way of life. But it is just that one issue that we will not face—just that one step that we have not the courage to take. Possibly it may be with us as it was with that young ruler: it is something to do with our money which is standing between us and that service of God which is perfect freedom. And Jesus, looking at us, loves us, but . . . !

VI.—Mary's Ointment

No doubt when Mary poured out her "ointment of spikenard very precious" on Jesus's head, as He sat at meat, it did look like waste. To take a box of costly ointment, worth perhaps £30 of English money,

and pour it on the head of one Man, showed, if nothing else, a lack of practical common sense. It was foolish, emotional, " just like a woman " ! Our Lord's disciples disapproved strongly. They said that it was sheer waste. How much more usefully the value of the ointment might have been expended. To these fishermen and peasants it was a fortune ; enough to keep a poor man's family for a whole year in a country like Palestine. And how many hungry and naked poor there were in Jerusalem. It might have been given to them. And here this silly, emotional woman had simply " wasted " it !

But Jesus was not of this opinion. If any one ever loved the poor, He did ; but He did not hesitate to assert that Mary had done right to pour it all out on Him. It had *not* been wasted. So far from that, this impulsive act was so pleasing to Him that He bestowed upon this woman the highest commendation given by Him to any single person of whom the Gospels tell us.

And why did He think so much of it ? It was foolish extravagant, impulsive, yes ; but it was an act prompted by simple devotion to Him personally. It was done just for love of Him. It might have been a foolish thing to do, but there was something beautiful and splendid all the same about reckless devotion of this kind, something that Our Lord loved to meet with.

What strikes one so forcibly in the Gospel story is the enormous value set by Jesus upon anything which sprang from a heart full of affection towards Himself. It was *that* that counted for so much with Him. He lived amongst a nation full to an unusual degree of people living correct and even painfully moral lives. But His heart never went out towards them. They left Him cold. On the other hand, we get glimpses here and there of men and women of many failings, sometimes even of sinful life—a Peter, a Mary Magdalene, a Zacchaeus, and He takes them to His heart and speaks His blessing on them. Why ? Because He has seen and felt that in spite of all they love Him.

This is, of course, the heart of all true religion—to love much: to love Christ and to love Him quite absolutely recklessly. There are so many thousands of good, earnest Christian people in the world to-day: their lives so exemplary, so blameless morally. And yet how comes it that all that piety makes so little impression on behalf of Christ on the generality of people? Why do these good people so largely fail to fire the imagination of other people and start them out on a quest of their own after Christ? Is it just this, namely, that, with all this moral excellence of theirs, it is so rarely that you ever catch one of them doing something really foolish, quixotic, and reckless for Christ? If only they were seen doing something really silly for love of Him; "going off the deep end" for him in some idiotic way; throwing everything to the winds, and not stopping to ask whether what they were doing was of the smallest practical use, but merely conscious that anyhow it was out of love for Him that they were doing it—well, it would make you want to throw up your hat and cheer.

Whatever people thought about religion in the Middle Ages, they never said that it was dull! But then you had people like St. Francis going about taking off their clothes and giving them to beggars; seizing hold of lepers and kissing them, and doing all sorts of perfectly preposterous things: but these same foolish doings did, anyhow, make people "sit up and take notice" of Christ, and did also make them feel that "there must be something in religion." The greatest disaster which ever befell Christ's religion was when it ceased to be quixotic and romantic, and became dull and respectable; when it lost its devotion to Christ. The Crusades were probably a very futile performance, but they were better than what Sunday morning church attendance stands for to-day in thousands of parishes. They at least had a romantic, if topsy-turvy, *love for Christ* at the back of them. Think for a moment of a mediæval church, with its perfectly reckless outpouring of artistic beauty of moulding and tracery, carved work and painted fresco,

and stained-glass windows and bejewelled altar, and contrast that with the kind of tight, dull featureless, and unimaginative church, to be found to-day in some of our Outer London suburbs. Behind these two churches lie two entirely different ways of thinking about Christ, and you see at once that what Christianity has lost to-day is its *romance:* its recklessly silly, passionate love of Christ which thought that nothing was too good, too costly to give Him; nothing too reckless to do for Him. How Christ does love people who are as reckless as He was Himself, and who never stop to count the cost. Peter, jumping into the sea to go to Him, and nearly getting himself drowned doing it; that foolish widow putting the whole of her living "at one go" into the offertory; Matthew leaving his money lying on his office desk to run after Him; Mary "wasting" her precious ointment. When such lovers of Christ are about many foolish things are done, no doubt, but still "the whole house is filled with the odour of the ointment" which they pour out so recklessly. And Christ loves the smell of spikenard; and there is one other thing which He loves—*folly*—of the right sort.

We want heaps of really foolish Christians! When we get them people will start thinking about Christ because they will be simply *forced* to. As it is, He is in danger of dying of the innocuous respectabilty of His followers.

VII.—"Without Love."

"All our doings without love are nothing worth," says the Quinquagesima collect. In other words, it is the *motive* which counts. Quite excellent things (even "bestowing all your goods to feed the poor") lose all their value if they are not done for the right motive—love. We may say that all Our Lord's teaching resolves itself into this one truth—that it is love which counts. Simon the Pharisee invited Our Lord to supper. It was a good thing to do; an act of hospitality. Yet Christ thought little of it. But he thought a great deal of the tears of a sinful woman who

washed His feet at that supper-table because "she loved much." Simon's supper was costly and excellent, but his neglect of elementary courtesies towards his Guest showed that he had not asked Him because he loved Him. Therefore the invitation was worth nothing. But those tears were priceless.

Jesus watched the rich casting their gifts into the offertory box and remained quite unmoved by this edifying spectacle. They were doing what was expected of them and customary. Then came a poor widow who cast in one farthing; but it happened to be all her living, and she gave it because she loved God. That made it at once worth all the other gifts put together. In mathematics you can multiply any number of figures you like by O, and they will be worth exactly nothing! and all the Ten Commandments are multiplied by O when love is a-wanting. Total value nil.

There was once a young man named Saul of Tarsus, an excellent young man who had always "walked blameless," but one day he wrote in a letter that he had come to see that all this righteousness had been worth just as much as "filthy rags," because it had all been practised to gratify his own self-esteem. Since those days he had come to know Jesus Christ, and now he was doing all that he did simply for love of Him, and that changed everything.

Our Lord described how people would come to Him in the Last Day and tell Him of all the good works that they had done and how He would say, "Yes; but ye did it not to *Me*." There had been no love towards Him mixed up with it, and therefore, again, it was worth nothing. On the other hand, how rich the value of only a cup of cold water given with love in His name!"

We need to watch our motives very carefully. Nothing could have been more exemplary than the life of a Pharisee. It was exemplary in *every* way—except one! There was no love behind it. He went to church, he prayed, he fasted, he gave alms, he kept the Sabbath and all the Commandments, but there

was no love behind any of these doings. In consequence, he was no better for doing them. They brought him no nearer to God, Who is Love.

Jesus said unhesitatingly that God preferred a sinner who loved Him to a righteous man who did not. Men in His day had made religion into an enormously complicated and difficult business. Jesus kept on saying that religion was an extremely simple thing—just love—which is one of the simplest things in the world.

If you ask what Our Lord was doing when He was here upon earth, one answer is that He wandered about Palestine trying to find out which people were prepared to love Him. In the end it was an odd lot that He collected—some of them were well-known sinners, and people shook their heads over them. But Our Lord knew exactly what He wanted: He wanted people who loved Him, and that was absolutely all that mattered. It's the same now. He does not care what you are like as long as He has got your heart. The Saints have all been people in love with Christ: that is what made them saints. It is what the Christian religion really consists of; it is a life lived with the love of Christ constraining you all the time.

People think that Christians go to Church because it is a pious habit. The real reason why they go is because Sunday is Christ's Resurrection Day, and they are keeping it for Him. If they give alms they do it as a bit of love towards Him Who loved *them* and gave Himself for them. If they keep Lent it's because it is His Lent which they are keeping.

Religion becomes a perfectly useless thing without love for Christ at the heart of it, but it is always sound, no matter what outward form it takes, whenever there's real love. Love for Christ can wear different dresses. A really earnest Evangelical likes a bare Church and a plain service, because he wants nothing to be there which might take his mind off Christ. The "ritualistic practices" of the Anglo-Catholic are also (if we would only try to understand other people) simply an expression of his love for Christ. He is giving Him the very best he can of rich and beautiful worship. As long

as the real love is there it is difficult to suppose that Christ minds in which of these different ways His people come to Him. As far as they express love for Him, He values both these ways of worship. Only when they are made the occasion and ground of self-assertion do they both become perfectly valueless to Him.

It was characteristic of Him to do Himself that which He had taught to others. Did He discern that all *His* doings also without love would be nothing worth, and that therefore there was something that He must do? Gethsemane, the Bloody Sweat, Calvary! Cannot you picture Him setting His face towards it all, saying to Himself, "It is love which counts," and so, drinking death, not as some men have drunk it, despairingly, from a phial, but triumphantly from a chalice—a loving-cup?

VIII.—Matthew, The Publican

Matthew belonged to that hated and despised class who in the Gospels are called "publicans." Publicans and sinners are always grouped together: that shows what was thought of them. The Romans employed some of the Palestinian natives to collect their taxes for them and the customs which they levied on imports and exports passing along the great trade routes and through the harbours of Galilee. These imposts were in the eyes of the Jews, a sore and vexatious burden laid upon them by their heathen oppressors, and the publicans were the hirelings and tools of these oppressors. They were therefore everything which was most renegade and unpatriotic: traitors to their nation. For a parallel we should have to think of a Belgian hiring himself out to the Germans to collect the exactions levied by them upon the people of Belgium during the German occupation. But more than this: the Romans farmed the taxes to them. This gave to the more unscrupulous of these publicans the opportunity to exact more than was actually due. They became

insolent and oppressive, and exercised a tyranny over their fellow-countrymen for which there was no redress. With the power of Rome behind them, these publicans could mulct people with impunity. They were known to be enriching themselves dishonestly. No wonder that they were hated.

Matthew was a publican or "little Mokhes" at Capernaum, a flourishing town and a port on the Lake of Galilee. It lay beside the great Eastern trade-route, and much dutiable merchandise passed by Matthew's excise-office. Here he lived, exercising his hateful and debasing trade. Probably he did not feel it to be so. It was his living, perhaps inherited from his father. He was inured to the business: it did not trouble his conscience. It was true that the Jewish Church and its leaders denounced this occupation, but they were narrow-minded, and, having been excommunicated by them, Matthew did not attach much importance to *their* opinion. So he was content with things as they were, and did not realise the degrading influence which his trade exercised upon him.

But the lake-side just opposite his office was a favourite haunt of Jesus. He often sat there and taught the crowds of people whom He never failed to draw together directly He appeared. Matthew, sitting in his office, used to hear what Jesus was saying, and gradually a new light began to be shed on things. His conscience became less comfortable than it used to be. Never man spake like this Man spake. "Gain the whole world and lose your own soul," He had said, and then had asked: "What can a man give in exchange for his soul?" to which there was no answer! Matthew found that he was beginning to ask himself questions—uncomfortable, disturbing questions. Was he losing his own soul for the sake of making money? And then something more: a dawning vision of a truer life that a man could live—giving instead of getting. How attractive this Jesus was! Your heart went out to Him somehow—a wonderful power about Him! And, so obviously, when you compared His way of life with your own, He was right and you were

wrong. Impossible not to see that, unless you wilfully blinded your eyes to the truth. Yes, one would have to think about it seriously and then—*decide what one meant to do about it*!

Decide—yes, that was it, but that would take some doing. Leave a snug business and an assured livelihood for what? To throw in your lot with this Jesus of Nazareth, not knowing in the least whither He would lead you or where it would all end. A foolhardy adventure: it took some courage for a man to face a risk like that.

And herein lies the point of his story. For what would nine out of ten people have done? They would have acknowledged to themselves that they were on the wrong road, but they would have gone on all the same, unable to face such an upheaval of their lives, lacking the courage to make so great a venture. The force of circumstances would have been too strong for them, and each day they would have gone back, miserable at heart, to the old life which had held them so long, unable to break with it. But Matthew had the strength of character to make the break. His conscience once enlightened, he determined to follow it at all costs with that extraordinary moral courage which is so rare, but so greatly blessed.

The Collect for St. Matthew's Day emphasises his wealth, and speaks of "the inordinate love of riches," but the point is surely not so much the amount of riches which he forsook as the fact that he had the courage to break with his past habits of life, and to resolve bravely to face and accept new light and to follow the better way when once he had seen it clearly. For this courage to accept and follow the inner light which comes from Christ, to break with what we have seen to be wrong or degrading or untrue, is just what such thousands of us lack. How many of us there must be who know in our inmost hearts that we ought to make a break with things as they are—those questionable methods of business—that tainted source of income—that sinful relationship or friendship—that

society of low moral tone—that idle, selfish life of mere pleasure-snatching and amusement—to leave *that* to follow *Christ*. In our hearts we want to; we can see ever so plainly that Christ is right, but we have not the courage to trust Him with our lives and to make the great adventure. Yet who that made that venture has ever repented having made it?

If Matthew made it, it was because he followed a decision of his *heart* and not of his head. Jesus Christ drew him to Himself in personal devotion, and that was the deciding factor. And this is why the world will never be able to do without Christ, because no power but His can do these things in men's lives. Moral teaching, education, and such things can indeed instruct and enlighten us, but Christ can *convert us*, and that is in the end the thing that we really need.

IX.—"Be of Good Cheer"

Our Lord has been called "The Man of Sorrows." The title comes, of course, from Isaiah's well-known description of the Suffering Servant of God in the famous 53rd Chapter. In some ways perhaps He was "a Man of Sorrows." He could scarcely have looked out on human life as it is and seen the evil that men do to each other, their wrongs and oppressions, and remained unmoved by the sadness of it all. Then again, the most sympathetic Heart that ever beat never failed, as we know, to be touched by the sight of human sorrow and suffering and wretchedness.

His picture of Lazarus the beggar, laid at Dives' gate, comes almost certainly from His recollection of a sight which He had seen and which must have made Him sad. Human sin is something which brings sorrow to the heart of any good man; how much more, therefore, to the heart of Him who saw as no other ever did the full measure of men's sin and its tragic consequences. We know that He wept over the sin of Jerusalem, the tragedy of her blindness and of her

impending desolation; and, indeed, the hardness of men's hearts, their rejection of Him (Who came to save them)—all the black ingratitude and hatred which culminated in Good Friday was enough to make "a Man of Sorrows" of anyone.

But all the same that is about the last title which He would ever have thought of applying to Himself. There is a sense in which Isaiah's words appropriately describe Him, but that is not the same thing as saying that He ever thought of Himself as "a Man of Sorrows." Such a way of regarding Himself would have been something entirely foreign to His whole nature and character. It has too much about it which carries the suggestion of weakness and of the desire for sympathy, and Christ was too courageous, too much a man to accept for Himself a title which had in it even the faintest implication of such things.

There is a passage in Canon Streeter's *Reality* which we shall take leave to quote here: "'Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? Behold and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow.' In their original context these wonderful words are the wail of Jerusalem desolated by the Babylonian conqueror; written beneath the crucifix, as if spoken by Christ Himself, they are misleading. The best men do not make pitiful appeals of this kind for themselves. They incline to be silent about or to understate their personal sufferings. Christ drank to the dregs the cup of disappointment and despair, but He did not pathetically call attention to the fact. He wore, but did not advertise, a crown of thorns."

It is therefore only with careful discrimination that we must speak of Our Lord as "The Man of Sorrows," for it can be (and we think it has been) misleading, as Canon Streeter says.

In Himself, as He stands before us in the Gospels, He was the exact opposite. He compared Himself and His disciples to a bridal party on a honeymoon, and gave that as His reason for not fasting as much as the Pharisees thought He ought to. His favourite saying was "Be of good cheer." His enemies found fault

with him precisely because He was too cheerful for a religious teacher, contrasting Him unfavourably with the more gloomy and dour character of John the Baptist. They objected to his going to so many supper-parties, especially with publicans and sinners, who were inclined to be jolly !

He is the author of " The Beatitudes." The real meaning of " blessed " is " happy." In the Beatitudes Jesus has given us a list of happy people. He said that the Kingdom of Heaven was such a jolly thing that it made you like a man who, having found a hidden treasure in a field, " in his joy " goes and sells his last stick of furniture to buy it.

Mr. Fosdick calls Him " the most radiant Person to be found in His day in Palestine." He spoke of His own life, even with its persecutions, as a blessed or happy life. He was anything but blind to the sin and pain and sorrow of the world, but He walked about it with an incurable optimism, telling people that the love of God and the beauty of God and the companionship of God were much bigger things than anything that they could see ; that all was really well behind the scenes and that the victory of right over wrong was perfectly sure.

Even at the Last Supper, with the Cross awaiting Him and Judas gone out to betray Him, He was talking to them about " His joy " and how He was passing it on to them. He was occupied in the happiest work that there is in the world—finding lost men and bringing them back to God. This, He said, made you as happy as a shepherd who has found a lost sheep, and it set the angels singing. The thing which made the elder brother aware that there was something up at home was the sound of " musick and dancing when he drew nigh to house." (May not this be a hint that that is the first thing that we shall hear when we draw nigh to Our Father's House in the next world ?)

The whole of his teaching was optimistic : the very message which He preached He called "TheGood News." Lastly He had a very great sense of humour, which is

constantly peeping out, and that is always a mark of a happy and merry heart. He forbade His disciples, even when they were fasting, to be " of a sad countenance," and so He has left the world the merriest religion that there is.

He describes God Himself as saying, " It was meet that we should make merry and be glad," and everyone who understands Jesus and His mind and teaching goes about the world with a merry heart, bidding others be of good cheer. The worst friends Christianity ever had were those who robbed it of its merry spirit, but, thank God, we still talk about a *merry* Christmas.

PART IV

LIVING A CHRISTIAN LIFE

I.—"A Good Heart Towards God"

The one occasion on which churches are everywhere crowded with overflowing congregations is that of the annual Harvest Thanksgiving.

Many of the Parish Clergy probably derive little satisfaction from this fact, but rather find in it a cause of distress and vexation. Literally thousands of people make annually on this occasion their one solitary appearance in the Parish Church, and are never seen there again until Harvest Thanksgiving comes round once more. Perhaps many of us Clergy, instead of being vexed at this phenomenon, would do better to give ourselves to searchings of heart, and to ask ourselves wherein we have so failed in our cure of souls and in the preaching of Christ's joyous Gospel to our people that we cannot get them to church on other Sundays of the year, not even at Christmas or on Easter Day. Those country clergy who, in all good conscience towards God, feel that they have done, as Parish Priests, all that is humanly possible, had better perhaps thank God that John Hodge and his family *do* come at least on this one day in the year. It is at any rate an evidence that somewhere at the back of their minds there is a dim and inarticulate faith in God's existence and a real, if somewhat inadequate, acknowledgment on their part that they are dependent upon Him for their daily bread and do owe Him some kind of thanks, if only once a year. At the worst the Parish Priest may even draw some consolation from reflecting that it is probably a manifestation of an ancient pagan religion (rooted in ideas connected with the fertility of the soil), which still persists unconsciously in the souls of his people; and even a pagan religion is better than no religion at all, for it at least testifies to a belief in an Unseen Power of some

kind. So let us clergy be thankful even for that, and, anyhow, not be downcast at the sight of a crowded Church on Harvest Thanksgiving Day.

But having said what we can in defence of Hodge, what about those other thousands whose lives are not bound up with the tilling of the soil? Do they, too, consider that it is sufficient to present themselves once a year before God to say "Thank you" to Him? Thankfulness does seem to be one of the rarest of all the virtues. And how much people miss, if they did but know it, by not cultivating the spirit of thanksgiving, for it is the very well-spring of a cheerful life. Thankfulness is the great high-road which leads to happiness. Almost the first thing which a child is taught to say in the Church Catechism is, "I heartily thank our heavenly Father."

Thus the key-note of a Christian life is struck. It is what the author of Ecclesiasticus described long ago in a charming phrase as having "a good heart towards God"—"Whether a man be rich or poor, if he have a good heart towards the Lord, he shall at all times rejoice with a cheerful countenance." It is, of course, this good heart towards God which is the direct cause of the ever-cheerful countenance, and it suggests a perpetual and abiding condition of mind—"at all times." For a thankful heart has nothing to do with outward circumstances. "Whether a man be rich or poor." Let us thank God that this is so, else only the rich and the fortunate could ever be thankful to God.

But as a matter of fact just the very opposite is the almost invariable rule. For imagine a congregation composed entirely of millionaires in the best of health; how much real thanksgiving do you seriously suppose that God would hear rising up from such a company of wholly prosperous people? Prosperity has a way of making people not more, but less thankful. There is a price to pay for prosperity. It is the loss of a thankful heart. This is why the Bible abounds in warnings about it: "When thou hast eaten and art full, then beware lest thou forget the Lord thy God";

and does not the Litany pray "that we may be delivered in all time of our wealth" (well-being)? Most of us, no doubt, know a few people who, having once been poor, have since prospered. Probably ninety per cent. of them who were once thankful for small mercies are now thankless for great ones.

On the other hand, if you want to find real thankfulness, you must go amongst the very poor. You will rarely fail to find it there. "The poor and needy give praise unto Thy name." Indeed they do. It was a widow whose entire living consisted of two mites who incontinently offered them as a thank-offering. The most thankful person the writer has ever known was a woman dying by inches of internal cancer. One of the last things she said was, "There's a lot to be thankful for, isn't there?" But then she had that good heart towards God. If more of us had that, we should quickly become heartily ashamed of one annual attendance at a Harvest Thanksgiving.

What is meant by "a good heart towards God"? Well, surely a heart which is full of a friendly feeling towards Him. There are some people who love God for His own sake because He is what He is, and they know Him as friend knows friend; and there are others who love Him (or think that they do) when He does them good, but turn sour and sulky towards Him when things go wrong. "If the harvest is a bad one, I will not give thanks." Every parson has people in his parish who have given up all religion because some stroke of adversity befell them. They mean to have no more dealings with a God who lets things like that happen! Oh for a sense of humour! Are they not telling everyone that their religion is purely a business matter—payment by results—"business is business"? I will love God if I find it pays me to do so, but if not . . . !

Oh for a good heart towards God at all times! It was out of a prison at Rome, where, after spending himself in God's service, he had apparently been abandoned by God and left to go to his death at the hands of Nero, that a man wrote to his friends at Colossæ

and told them to be thankful. "And let the peace of God rule in your hearts and be ye thankful." Don't you envy the man who could write that?

II.—The General Confession

The General Confession first made its appearance in the Second Prayer Book of Edward VI. (1552). In the first English Prayer Book (1549) Matins and Evensong began at the Lord's Prayer, but by 1552, under foreign Protestant influence, private confession was being strongly discouraged, and this "General Confession" was intended to be a substitute for it. It was to be said by the whole congregation *generally*, and it also made a *general* confession of sin, without specifying particular offences.

Now it is a fairly common thing to hear people objecting to this Confession of Sin. They refuse to call themselves "miserable sinners," and they say that they do not in the least feel like "lost sheep." This is a great pity, because they would be so much happier if they did. The happiest people in the world are the penitents. The reason is because God dearly loves people who are sorry about their sins, and sends them His peace, "which passeth all understanding," and this peace of His is a very great and precious treasure. We must not be surprised at God liking people who are ready to say that they are sorry, because that is exactly what we do ourselves. He is just like us (having made us in His image), and, therefore, likes better people who come and say that they are sorry than people who do not.

There is something very nice about people who are ready to say that they are sorry. They are very lovable sort of people, being warm-hearted and tender-hearted and humble-minded, whereas we have but little liking for people who are self-complacent, and who say that "They have nothing to be sorry for." You feel quite helpless with that sort of people: you can make nothing of them nor do anything with them.

Those of us who have children will realise this fact best of all. Which is the child to whom we are most drawn? The one who stamps its foot and wants to argue and goes on sulking, or the one that comes and puts its arms round your neck and says, "Dad" (or "Mum"), "I'm sorry"? We feel instinctively that the one child has such a much better nature than the other, and such a much warmer heart. This is obviously the child who loves us best and who best realises our love for it.

The reason why it feels sorry when it sees that it has grieved us or caused us pain is because it loves us. All penitence springs from *love*, which is the root of it. "She loved much," said Jesus, about the woman who washed His feet with her tears; and the people who are never sorry are the people who love no one but themselves. This is why Jesus says that "There is more joy in Heaven over one sinner that repenteth than over ninety and nine just persons who need no repentance." Of *course*, there is great joy in Heaven, because God has found someone who loves him. The ninety and nine just persons are so very likely to be unimaginative prigs, who leave Him quite unmoved with their complacent self-righteousness. The repentant sinner is like the child we spoke of who comes, and, so to speak, puts its arms round God's neck, and, by so doing, tugs at His heart-strings; and when Jesus said that God is our Father and we are His children, He meant it quite literally. He feels just as we do about it when we are dealing with *our* children.

And then, again, what a charming thing humble-mindedness is! You cannot help loving humble-minded people. Which of us does not unhesitatingly feel a kind of affection for the poor publican "who stood afar off and would not so much as lift up his eyes unto Heaven," and could only say, "God be merciful to me a sinner"? Whereas the self-righteous Pharisee who "thanked God that he was not as other men are," merely irritates us. We feel that we detest the nasty fellow. And if we ask why Jesus was always to be

found in the company of the publicans and sinners, one of the answers is because these people were so much more lovable than any other kind, for they were of the sort who are humble-minded and ready to say that they are sorry. Therefore, Jesus loved them and said that God loved them too.

So why should not we be ready to tell God that we are sorry? Surely there is plenty to be sorry about in the life and conduct of any one of us, not only as regards the things which we have done, but also touching the things which "we have left undone." For some of the worst sins that we commit are precisely those of neglect and omission; and it is so often the failure on our part to do the thing "which we ought to have done" which is so disastrous in its consequences for others. If we only realised it, we are *at our very best* when we are on our knees before God, telling Him that we are sorry. And that is another reason why there is joy in Heaven, because God is seeing us at our very best.

Nobody (least of all God) asks us to brood over our sins or to give ourselves over to morbid introspection, which is a thoroughly unhealthy thing to do; but simple honest confession of our sins is a most health-giving thing. It is like opening a tumour and getting rid of the imprisoned badness; it is like Bunyan's Pilgrim getting a great load rolled off his shoulders; it is like clearing the dead ashes away from the fire and so causing it to burn clear and bright once more. Repentance always liberates and renovates. Sins which remain unconfessed, and, therefore, unforgiven, are what modern psychology calls "a repressed complex," and the first thing to do is to get rid of repressed complexes. When Jesus went about telling people that the first thing to do was to repent, and telling those that did repent that "their sins were forgiven," He was acting in a strictly scientific way in dealing with human souls. After all, we *are* rather like "lost sheep," are we not?

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III.—Saying Our Prayers

There must be a very large number of people who never say a prayer. Many, no doubt, honestly believe that it is useless to pray, "because it makes no difference to anything." There are others who say, "What is the use of informing God of my needs which He knows already?" Others, again, convinced that the universe is based on immutable law, say that it is impossible to interfere with God's laws or to change His will; and there are some who have given up praying because "their prayers are never answered"!

Now every one of these objections rests on a misconception of what prayer really is and of what the object of it is. Probably ninety-nine people out of a hundred think that prayer means asking God for things which we need. There is, of course, a place in prayer for asking, but asking for things is neither the whole of prayer, nor by any means the most important part of it. We had, therefore, better say at once what prayer really is. It is *converse with God, and its whole object is to keep us in touch with Him.*

When we talk about our "spiritual life," what we really mean is that part of us which we call "I," or our self—our personality, character: that part of us which is either good or bad; keeps or loses its temper; is generous or mean; selfish or unselfish; cheerful or depressed. This personality of ours needs, of course, to be kept up to the mark. All around us are forces —people, things, customs, temptations, suggestions, ideas—which tend to influence our personality or character in a downward direction.

The one thing about which we have been learning so much lately is the reality of spiritual forces. It is becoming more and more evident that spirit is the one absolutely real thing in the universe, and that influence and suggestion are the most powerful means through which spiritual forces act upon us. Now it ought to be evident that our personalities, being exposed so continually as they are to the action of influences and

suggestions which are not of the highest, and many of which are positively evil, we have but a poor chance of being at our best, unless in some way or other we take steps to counteract all this stream of downgrade influence which is pouring over us for a great many hours every day. The only thing that can possibly counteract it is an influence which is entirely good.

We must get into touch, and *keep* in touch with forces and suggestions which are wholly beautiful, and true, and great, if we wish to stand upright. The reality and power of influence is one of the commonplaces of human life. We can be made (and that quite easily) either cheerful or depressed, cowardly or courageous, selfish or unselfish, by the influence of other people upon us. If, then, merely human personalities can have such a real and powerful effect upon us, what must be the effect of the personality and influence of God brought to bear upon us?

God is Light, and Love, and Beauty, and Truth, and Courage, and Goodness. He is the Source and Wellspring of everything that is great and beautiful and true. The more closely, therefore, we can keep in touch with Him, put ourselves under His influence, open up our minds to the suggestions of Him, "from Whom all holy desires, all good counsels, and all just works do proceed," the better for us.

And influence of course, is brought to bear most simply and directly by converse and communion between two people. When we pray, therefore, our immediate and (in the first instance) only object is to get into touch with God, and to open up our hearts and minds to all the good and beautiful influences which are always radiating from Him. Just as sunlight is the source of physical health, so God is the source of spiritual health, and it is simply a question of placing ourselves beneath His rays.

Prayer is just the very simple means by which we make it possible for God's influence to be brought to bear upon ourselves. If we never speak to God, nor seek His face, nor take any steps to get into touch with Him, we remain outside all this potential influence

for good which otherwise would be flowing *out* from Him and *in* upon us. "Influence" simply means "inflowing," does it not? When, for instance, we are feeling selfish, we need a fresh supply of unselfishness or love from God, who is full of it Himself. When we are short of temper, we need more good-temper from the same source.

When we are afraid, contact with Him will put new courage into us, and when we are worried or depressed, a few minutes spent in His company will cheer us up and fill us with new peace and hope. *Asking* does not necessarily come into it; it is simply a question of *contact.* Thoroughly cheerful friends will raise our drooping spirits for us if we merely go and talk to them for five minutes. We do not need to *ask* them for cheerfulness; we merely have to go and see them. Saying your prayers is just simply *going to see God* for five minutes, and is it not extremely likely that a man or a woman who has begun the day by doing this, will in consequence spend that day more cheerfully, more courageously, more unselfishly, more honestly in business affairs, more patiently under annoyances than if he or she had begun it without having come into any kind of contact with any one so good and beautiful as God? It must be worth while to "go and see" Him for five minutes before we begin our day. It must surely make a difference.

IV.—"Unanswered" Prayers

"My prayers were never answered, so I gave them up." We should not hear this so often if people had got those right ideas about prayer which we have been trying to explain. Disappointments come in the first instance from imagining that prayer is asking for *things.* But prayer is asking for *God*—a very different matter! Not that we are never to ask for *things.* The Lord's Prayer bids us ask for forgiveness; for deliverance from the power of temptation and for our daily

bread. But notice that, out of three petitions for our own needs, two are for purely spiritual things, and the third asks for the minimum necessary to keep us alive —bread sufficient for one day ; and just *bread*—not cake!

For the Lord's Prayer, must be read in conjunction with Our Lord's teaching about " not being anxious as to what we shall eat or drink or wherewithal we shall be clothed." Anxiety about these things, He says, is characteristic of the Gentile heathen. The Christian leaves all that to His Heavenly Father, " Who knoweth what things ye have need of " and Who feeds the birds. Therefore it is enough to ask for *bread*, and His advice to us is to stop *there*. Because, you see, when we start asking for things, we do sometimes ask for such foolish and harmful ones. In the requests which we make to God we are often no wiser than our children are in the things which they ask of us.

Your little son, aged five, wants to have that bright, jolly-looking thing which father shaves with in the morning. But you do not give it to him. You know better. No doubt he thinks it's horrid of you. But you are wiser than he is, and that is the reason why he doesn't get it. And so we go running to God and ask for this and that which we think we would like to have and want so desperately badly. But nine times out of ten to have them given to us would be just the worst thing possible for us. We cannot see far enough, and do not know enough. We forget " our ignorance in asking " of which the Prayer Book speaks. That same Book also reminds us that God " knows our necessities before we ask," and " our necessities " are, of course, the things *really necessary for our good*, which is not at all the same as the things which *we think we would like* !

And, forgetting this, we so often pray unconsciously to have *our* will done, instead of having God's will for us done. We try to bend His will to our ignorant will ; whereas the whole aim of prayer ought to be exactly the opposite, namely, to learn God's will for us. The writer would like to offer his humble advice to his readers, to make asking for things which have to do

with their worldly affairs and circumstances, a very small part indeed of their prayers, and, better still, never to ask for any *material* benefit for themselves at all. If we leave all that simply to God, we shall be acting very wisely. After all, *our* children never have to ask *us* to give them food and clothing, do they? We just do it as a matter of course because they are our children. To *ask* us for these essential needs is superfluous. They just leave it to us and don't worry. Well, do the same with your Heavenly Father, and leave it to Him. "My prayers were unanswered." But did I ask for the wrong things? The writer once knew a man who used to pray that his speculative investments might turn out right!

Another mistake that we make is that of expecting our prayers to be answered in *our* way. But God often answers them in *His*. The classical instance of this is the prayer of Monica, the mother of Augustine, who prayed so desperately earnestly that her son (at that time a dissolute youth) might not be allowed to go to Rome, where she foresaw nothing but appalling temptation awaiting him. But to Rome he went; only it was through going to Rome that he came to Milan, where he was converted to God and became *Saint* Augustine. God answered Monica's prayer all right, only in His way and not in hers, and what a much better way it was!

Then, again, we are so impatient—(and so like children in this respect)—we want our prayers answered *at once*. "Daddy, I want it *now*. Do let me have it now." How often parents listen to this. And what do they say? They say, "Presently, Sonny, not just now." And then these same parents go to God and say, "I want it now!" and then if the answer does not come at once, they say that their prayers were not answered! Yet things given *at the wrong time* may be extremely harmful, as every parent knows.

Lastly, we forget, do we not, that "No" is an answer as much as "Yes"? Sometimes, in dealing with our children, the answer *has* to be "No"; but it *is* an answer

and a very definite one, which is not at all the same thing as a request unheeded or ignored. And here we know where to look for the classic example. "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me." But it was not possible, and the answer was "No." But you will remember that He was careful to say that, whatever the answer was, "might God's will and not His own will be done"; and, being satisfied that, though the answer was "No," yet that was the answer which was God's will for Him, He marched away to Calvary with a heart at peace and a good courage shining out from His eyes. He had got His answer and was quite, quite satisfied that it was the right one. And so it was!

V.—Going To Church

People do not go to Church much nowadays. There are, of course, many reasons (or excuses?) for this. Firstly, there are so many counter-attractions—motoring, golf, tennis, the river. Then there seems to be a widespread unsettlement or vagueness of belief. People seem to think that God has become an open question. Or again, there are those dreadful people the clergy! Many of us do preach so badly and read so uninterestingly, and Morning Prayer, as performed in the Church of England, can be so frightfully uninspiring. So why go to church? Well, here are some simple reasons for going in spite of all this.

First of all, do not let us be humbugs. It's all very well to pretend that we do not believe in God, but all the same most of us do! Call the first man whom you meet in the train on Monday morning an infidel and see what he will say to you! How many people could you find in England to-day who would openly call themselves Agnostics or Atheists or unbelievers? There are some, of course; but really they are a very small proportion of the nation.

Every working parson who visits amongst his people

knows this. Directly there is sickness or trouble of some kind, people who never set their foot inside a church begin talking about God and starting to say little prayers for help—and many even send for the parson! So we *do* believe in God; of course we do. Then if we do, let us say so, like the honest folk that we really are at heart, and *show* that we do. Because it isn't quite "cricket," is it, to believe in God whenever there's trouble around and to pretend that we don't all the rest of the time? That's like cutting the Smiths, whom "we don't know socially," but not minding sending round to them when we have run out of milk! Let us either do the one or the other.

After all, it's a fine thing to believe in God; but a belief in Him which is unconfessed in any way at all is of no use to anyone. To go to church and take part in worship is obviously a simple and practical way of saying that we have some kind of belief in God. How else are other people to know that we believe in God at all? So when Sunday comes, why not step along to the old Parish Church or to wherever it is that people are meeting to worship God, and "make one more?" It is worth doing; and the idea that to go humbly and quietly to church is "setting up to be religious" is just sheer nonsense, as we very well know. The man who goes is immensely to be respected.

Then, as to being bored when we get there. Can anybody possibly have found a service more boring than Our Lord (with His wonderful mind and deep spirituality) must have found those awfully dull services in the little synagogues of Galilee? To Him it must have been just torture to listen to a Scribe or a Rabbi expounding the Law of Moses. He must have simply sighed and groaned over it. Probably the only decent sermon that was ever preached in the synagogue at Nazareth was the one which He preached Himself. But, boring as it was, He went every Sabbath Day and never missed.

That was because He was a great soul, and believed in that great and simple word, "duty." He saw in

His presence at worship His duty to God, and His duty to His fellow-men. The word " duty " seems to be as nearly as possible dead nowadays. It has been supplanted by " What I like," which is, of course, a great step downwards, for the idea of duty is the foundation of everything that is worthy of the name of " character."

Well, there is that ancient and, after all, rather valuable institution known as the Church of England. A most astonishing and unexpected interest has been taken in her lately by all sorts of unlikely people, just because she wanted to revise her Prayer Book. And what crowds of people, who never go inside a church, had quite a lot to say about the Prayer Book ! Which shows what an odd world it is that we live in. It also shows what a lot we really do care about having a religion of some kind as a nation.

That old Church of England, with its fine old Parish Church nestling amongst the trees in every village in our land ; our dead sleeping in God's acre beneath its walls ; the place where we were christened, and confirmed and married, and where we are going to go at least once more anyhow some day, when our time comes —isn't it worth preserving ? Would we like to see it all swept away ? Should we not begin to miss it somehow if it were no longer there ? But that's what will happen if we don't support it.

Did we ever hear of any society or club or institution which could keep going when its members gave up holding meetings ? How long would our golf club or tennis club last if the members never assembled and met together ? Suppose suddenly, on one and the same Sunday, *everyone* said, " I'm not going to church," what would happen then ? If we are Christian people at all, then we have a duty to the other members of the Christian Fellowship—and that is " to assemble and meet together with them," as the dear old Prayer Book says. Let's do our bit.

Anyhow, whatever we do, don't let us allow a parson to come and hold snappy little services for us at our golf club ; for, if we do that, we are letting him treat us like a lot of spoilt babies and allowing ourselves

to be thoroughly humiliated. In our pew in the old Parish Church we have at least some dignity; and really, after all, it's rather a jolly place in which to be.

VI.—The Sacraments

Leaving aside entirely any kind of scholarship or historical inquiry, what can a plain man reasonably believe about the Sacraments? We will concede at once that they are not *indispensable*, for "God fulfils Himself in many ways," and there must obviously be more ways than one of establishing contact with God. But, granting this, it is still worth considering whether the method of Sacraments may not be *one* of the ways, and a very real way, by which access to God and His grace lies open to a man's soul. Avoiding, therefore, anything controversial, let us ask What is the reasonable basis on which Sacraments rest?

Now Sacraments are not an invention of the Church, nor even of Our Lord. He ordained two, but Sacraments, as such, were not new things; neither are they peculiar to the Christian religion. On the contrary, they are as old as the world, and, as a matter of fact, something of which we make use unconsciously every day of our lives. They are some of the commonest things in life, and, indeed, half the things we do and a large number of the things of which we make use are sacramental in character. The Church Catechism defines them as "outward and visible signs" of something inward and spiritual "given unto us." It also says that they are "means" by which we receive what is unseen, and "pledges" to assure us thereof.

Let us take some simple illustrations. To begin with, you yourself are sacramental. Your personality, your "self" is something spiritual and invisible. We cannot see *you*, for "you" are a spirit. But by means of your outward and visible body we cant establish contact with your unseen and hidden self. Your body is firstly an outward and visible "sign" of your presence. Ordinarily and humanly speaking it is the only way by which we know that you are there at all.

(We are not for the moment discussing telepathy or anything of that sort, but speaking of our normal everyday lives.) Further, it is the " means " by which we can have fellowship with you. The expression of your eyes, the sound of your voice, the grasp of your hand are the means by which you communicate yourself to us, and by which we are able to get into touch with your spiritual self.

If we lived in a purely spiritual environment, we could manage without your body, but, in a material world, it is only through what is material and seen that we can reach you at all. Through the medium of your body your friends are constantly receiving from you things which are inward and spiritual. What is a mother's kiss given to her child or the silent hand-clasp of a friend but a sacrament—something spiritual, unseen—love, friendship—conveyed by an outward and visible sign and means ? Or again, give Kreisler a piece of wood, some gut and some horsehair, and with these outward and visible things he will bring to your soul the purely spiritual emotions and messages called forth by music. But he needs his violin in order to reach your soul.

In fact, all art is sacramental. A picture is really canvas and paint, and a poem is paper and printing ink, but they are both very much more than this. They are both something spiritual which reaches your soul by means of things outward and visible and which cannot reach it without the help of these things. A bank-note is a sacrament. In itself it is a piece of paper worth intrinsically perhaps a few pence, but its actual value is £5, because it carries something unseen and spiritual, that is, a promise from the Bank of England which has never been known to be broken ; and it is this spiritual content which makes it worth £5 ; it is " a pledge to assure us " of the integrity of the Bank of England.

Sacraments rest, therefore, on a principle woven into the very fabric of the universe and into the common stuff of which human lives are made. They are all about us on every side. It does not therefore, seem a very long step to suppose that they may find

a place in religion. Indeed, it is the very sphere where we might most readily expect to find them in operation, for the great purpose of religion is to put us into touch with the unseen spiritual world. Every Christmas brings us afresh the message of the Incarnation. Here is a sacrament.

If God was to be on earth in a manner which would make His Presence capable of being apprehended by men, it was only through a human body that the Life could be manifested. "The life was manifested, and we have seen it." If God was to be seen and known and not merely speculated about, there was no other way possible except the sacramental way. Nor does it seem a very difficult thing to believe that through such simple, common things of earth as water or bread and wine that which is spiritual can be brought near to human souls.

Science seems to be telling us that the very basis of matter is something spiritual; in other words that the line of demarcation between what is material and what is spiritual is almost impossible to define, and for this reason the general principle underlying Sacraments ought to be no very great stumbling-block. If a violin or a canvas or a printed page used by man can bring to my soul the spiritual reality of what is beautiful, why should not water or bread and wine used by God bring to my soul the spiritual reality of what is good; in other words, the Grace of God? May not, for instance, the Breaking of Bread be God's way of giving us His Right Hand—a sign that He is near us—a means of His reaching down to us, and a pledge to assure us that He wants to help us?

"Why not? The spiritual world is continually reaching us through what is material, and there may be in the world more things than we realise which can become vehicles of it.

VII.—"The Breaking of Bread"

It is plain from the New Testament that Christ's earliest disciples were in the habit of meeting for a very

simple service, which they called "The Breaking of Bread." This was their only act of *Christian* worship. They had no other. To take part in it marked those who did so as Christ's disciples, for a Christian was one who, in the company of his fellow-believers, broke the bread in remembrance of Christ. "And they continued steadfastly . . . in the Breaking of Bread."

What were probably the main ideas associated in their minds with this service?

In the first place, it was surely just a natural act of affection towards Him, the Master. At that farewell gathering in the upper room He had taken bread, had broken it, and given it to them, and then had bidden them "do this" in remembrance of Him. Now that He was no longer with them in bodily form, it must have seemed the simplest and most obvious way of showing Him that He was not forgotten, and of keeping alive within their own hearts the flame of their love for Him. He had called them His "friends" that evening. "Ye are my friends," He had said. If a man's friends could not be relied upon to do a simple thing like that in memory of Him, they would be scarcely worthy of the name of friends at all; and so the Breaking of Bread was a gathering of the friends of Jesus.

And still it is first and foremost this simple affection for Christ, this desire to show Him that He is not forgotten, which draws the feet of those for whom He is Lord and Friend to the Breaking of Bread. If we would only think of it more as an act of love and obedience on our part towards Him, and think less of it as something calculated to benefit our own souls, we should perhaps go more gladly and willingly than we do. It is an act of friendship towards Him, and if we make it this, can we doubt that He will value it very highly?

Then, secondly, we can be sure that they saw in it an act of fellowship. They called it the "Communion," i.e. the fellowship. They seem also to have called it at first the "love feast" (agape), or, at any rate, it was probably preceded by a common meal to which this name was given. Thus the Breaking of Bread was felt to be an act of fellowship which bound Chris-

tians to each other, just as and because it bound them all to their common Lord. "We, the many," says St. Paul, "are all one bread, for we are all partakers of the one bread (or loaf)."

In those days, when Christians were few and scattered, they must have seen in this weekly gathering a powerful bond of unity between themselves. It was a sacrament of brotherhood. A meal, all the world over, has always been regarded as an act of fellowship, and in the case of this meal of the Breaking of Bread they must have been conscious that what had drawn them all together was a common devotion to Christ, which made them as "one loaf" compacted together out of many separate individual grains.

It is one of the greatest tragedies imaginable that this simple meal of fellowship has become one of the most fruitful causes of division amongst Christian people, simply because various doctrinal aspects of it have been developed about which it is possible to disagree. If only we could somehow cease to dispute about the various interpretations which can be put upon it and could be content with those utterly simple ideas about it which apparently contented Our Lord's earliest disciples, it might become again a great power, making for that fellowship which we so sorely need.

The simplest ideas about any matter are generally in the end the truest and the greatest and the ones which matter most. Without for one moment denying that later and more highly-developed ideas about it may be perfectly true, it is, to say the least, extremely probable that the simplest and earliest ideas associated with the Breaking of Bread are the most vital and important, and most likely to be in harmony with that amazing simplicity which is the outstanding characteristic of Christ's teaching.

Lastly, what may we suppose that the words "Do this in remembrance of Me" meant to them? Do what? It is a possible answer that they meant only "Break the Bread." But we cannot help asking whether, in view of the circumstances under which those words were spoken, with the Cross so near, and

remembering what He had said to them about His body being broken and His blood shed for them and for many, they could have failed to see in them a command to do the very thing which He Himself had done and to follow Him themselves along the road of sacrifice. It would be unlike Our Lord to ordain anything which was simply a ceremony and which had not got a great vital and sacramental meaning behind it. The broken bread and the cup of red wine must have recalled Calvary irresistibly to their minds and "Do this" can scarcely have meant less to them than "Go and do thou likewise."

If we saw in the Breaking of Bread a continually renewed summons to the sacrifice of ourselves for the sake of others, and not merely a summons to attend a service, we might begin to realise that there was a good deal of point in going to it, when once we had learnt to give the right meaning to the command "Do this." The capacity for self-sacrifice is latent within all of us, and is really an instinct characteristic of our human nature. But it needs to be evoked. Kneeling at the Breaking of Bread we can learn better than anywhere else what it is that Christ really wants to see us doing and be reminded of what it is to which He is summoning us. It is there that we can most plainly hear His voice bidding us "Do this," and we cannot, with the broken bread before us, be in any very great doubt as to what it is that we have to do.

VIII.—"Forgiving One Another"

There are probably few things which we find more difficult than to freely and frankly forgive those who have done us wrong, and people, even when the will to forgive is there, display only too often an almost complete lack of understanding of what forgiveness really involves. How often do we hear the pathetically foolish statement, "I will forgive, but I cannot forget;" which is, of course, no forgiveness at all. Or, again, people will say, "I will forgive them when they come

and say that they are sorry." But there is no virtue whatever in that.

Our Lord would say, "What thank have ye? Do not even the publicans the same?" Indeed, to refuse to forgive the person who has said that he is sorry is to put yourself horribly in the wrong, and to show that the penitent offender is a far better man than you are yourself.

Real forgiveness is something very different from this kind of thing and very much more difficult. It is not even the mere passing over of some wrong done to us and the abstaining from reprisals, but to really forgive entails two tremendous acts of self-mastery. In the first place it entails the willing acceptance of the wrong done to us. In the words of the New Testament, we must be willing "to bear in our own body" the sin which has been done against us. We must take upon our own shoulders the iniquity of those who have wronged us. For we can only really forgive by paying a price ourselves for the forgiveness which we extend. We must, in short, sacrifice ourselves; for forgiveness is a costly thing; it can never be given cheaply. It means taking over the sin of those who have despitefully used us and transforming it into a sacrifice accepted in ourselves. Our rights, our feelings must all be sacrificed; we must make an offering of them to God.

It is this fact about forgiveness which illuminates Calvary and throws a flood of light upon the true meaning of the words, "Who Himself bear our sins in His own Body on the tree." This is God accepting and bearing "the contradiction of sinners against Himself." Directly I demand any kind of compensation or amends (such as an apology even) for the wrong done to me, I am failing to extend real forgiveness; I am spoiling it all. I must suffer in order to forgive.

"Without the shedding of blood there is no remission." That statement is more true than we sometimes realise; for we must be ready to go to Calvary ourselves in order to forgive really and completely.

And secondly, it entails an attitude of whole-hearted love towards those whom we would forgive. Forgiveness is not a mere act; it is an attitude of a

person towards another who has wronged him. We must treat the guilty person as though he were actually innocent, think of him with undimmed love and gentleness, wish him well and be prepared to pray for him and to do good to him when the opportunity comes. "Do good to them that hate you and pray for them that despitefully use you." That is Christ's definition of forgiveness, and nothing less than that is forgiveness.

It is of no avail to say that we have forgiven people unless we are trying to think the very best of them, trying honestly to see in them all the good that we can and making every possible excuse for them in our hearts.

At Golgotha Our Lord prayed for His enemies: "Father, forgive them." He made excuses for them. "They know not what they do." And can we doubt that He would have been the very first to do good to any one of them who needed His help?

It is quite certain that we have not really forgiven those for whom we will not kneel down and pray honestly and sincerely that God will bless them. That is the crucial test. We must have in us "the mind which was in Christ Jesus," the mind that is ready to pray for those who have wronged us.

So forgiveness is a difficult thing for which we need the help of the grace of God.

But however difficult forgiveness is, to refuse to forgive is disastrous to our own souls, because we are shutting ourselves out from the forgiveness which we ourselves need at the hands of God.

"If ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will My heavenly Father forgive you your trespasses." Our Lord is here simply stating what is a law of the spiritual world. It is not that God will not, but that He cannot forgive us, so long as we will not forgive our brother. The reason is because (as we said above) forgiveness is an attitude of mind and heart. The man who will not forgive has hardened his heart. He has made it like granite which no gentle, refreshing rain can penetrate. No peace of God, no blessing can enter in there.

Did we but realise, it we are harming no one so much as ourselves: we are damaging our own souls. We are

very nearly at our worst when we refuse to forgive. Everyone who reads Christ's parable of " The Unmerciful Servant " is furiously indignant with the man who, having just been freely forgiven himself, went straight out and took his fellow-servant by the throat.

But we are all of us like that man when we will not forgive. The Lord's Prayer bids us pray that we may be forgiven as we forgive them that trespass against us. To pray this prayer with unforgiveness in our hearts is to pray that we ourselves may *not* be forgiven!

There is a sentence in the New Testament which reads thus: " And be ye kind one to another; tenderhearted, forgiving one another even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." What an altogether lovely sentence!

IX.—Argumentum Ad Hominem

Because St. Andrew was the first of all to throw in his lot with Christ and to follow Him, his day comes first amongst the Saints' Days in the Calendar of the Christian Year; and because, directly he had found Christ for himself, his first and foremost impulse was to go straight away and bring his own brother to Christ also, he stands as the type and embodiment of the missionary spirit. For at least fifty years St. Andrew's tide has been set apart in the Church of England as a time appropriated to the cause of Overseas Missions.

Some of you, perhaps, having reached those two last words, will read no further! You will say to yourselves " Oh, Overseas Missions; I don't want to hear about them. I don't believe in them." Just one minute, please, before you turn over to read about something more interesting. Just give me time to say that if you do not believe in Overseas Missions you really are one of the oddest people imaginable, because you are yourself the product and result of Overseas Missions!

Have you ever asked yourself how you come to be living in a Christianised country with Christian institutions and Christian customs, or why it is that your own mentality, your general outlook, is a Christian one?

It is, of course, because some eighteen hundred or more years ago some misguided and quixotic disciples of Christ left home and friends and safety and comfort, and, taking their lives in their hands, tramped across Europe, until eventually some of them reached the shores of some outlandish and heathen islands called Britannia, lying out towards the Atlantic, on the utmost confines of the Roman Empire.

They came to tell the story of Christ to a people whom they had never seen and who had no earthly claim upon them. They came because they felt that they *must* come ; because they knew within themselves that to have such good news to tell to other men and not to tell it would have sore troubled their consciences. So you owe the Christian atmosphere in which you live to *them*. Can you quite honestly and truthfully say that you wish that those " Missionaries " had never come to these shores ? Or are you really glad and thankful that they came, and willing to admit that anyhow their coming has made a vast difference to you for good ? If so, you must not go on saying that " you do not believe in Overseas Missions," for it is quite clear that you do.

At least it is clear that you do believe in them when it was to *your* country that Overseas Missions came. You only disbelieve in them when it is proposed to send them to other people's countries ! But that won't do, will it ? You cannot have it both ways. So be quite honest, man, and admit that if it was good for savage Britain to hear the glad news of Christ, it must be good for savage Africa too. What is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander, is it not ?

Do you either really doubt that the preaching of Christ's good news is likely, nay, certain, to have the same blessed results there as it had here ? Indeed, if you will travel as far as e.g., Uganda, you will be able to see that for yourself. You will find yourself there in a Christianised land, which only sixty years ago was a blood-soaked country, full of darkness and cruel habitations, a land of human sacrifices and of all the nameless terrors of savage heathendom. To-day its

people live as secure as we do here in England. It was Christ's Gospel which made the change.

But now you say, "Well, but look at all the heathen people in this England of ours! Why don't you first convert *them*? When you have done that, it will be time enough to start converting people in China." That sounds such real common sense, does it not? But if only you knew what a poor, outworn, threadbare silly excuse it is you would not repeat it. Have you ever asked yourself what would have happened if Christian people had talked like that in Palestine when the Christian Church was just beginning its career? Perhaps some did talk like that and said, "Wait until you have converted everyone in Jerusalem before you start going overseas." I fear me, if they had been listened to, the Christian Church would still be sticking in Jerusalem to-day, an inconspicuous and unimportant sect, and they would still not have got all the people in Jerusalem converted!

And in that case the Gospel would still not have reached Britain! Seriously, if you heard a parson with a large parish say that he was not going to make any attempt to reach the people in his parish generally until he had first converted every soul in King-street, would you not dub him off-hand an arrant fool? If a business man said, "I will not open a branch of my business in Leicester until I have first made a customer of everyone in Manchester," would you expect his business to grow and expand and prosper? What is England but, as it were, one street in the great parish of the world?

What hope is there for a religion which locks itself up in one small sphere and goes round and round inside that for ever, like a squirrel in a cage? Expansion or stagnation—those are the alternatives, as every business man knows in his own business. The alternatives are the same for the Christian Religion. And thereby hangs a tale. As a matter of fact, one group of Christians, those at Jerusalem, did refuse to go outside to preach to other people. They became a narrow sect and finally dwindled and disappeared completely! Over against that tragic history stands the great Holy

Catholic Church, covering to-day almost the whole world, simply because it believed in Overseas Missions; in other words, believed in going after your brother to bring him too to Christ.

X.—All Saints

"All Saints' Day." It is good to see that word, "All." It expresses a great truth which we need to remember, namely, how many humble, undistinguished, unknown, unremembered folk are to be numbered amongst the Saints. For this very reason All Saints' Day was inserted in the Calendar. The well-known Saints of the New Testament, the Apostles, Evangelists, Martyrs, have each his own day of remembrance, but these, thank God, are not *all* the Saints. Besides them there is a great multitude, which no man can number, whose names are not written in the Book of History, but are written in the Book of Life. It is these whom we remember with thanksgiving on All Saints' Day.

The idea of what constitutes a Saint has become sadly distorted in people's minds; for a great many varying influences have conspired to invest the Saints with the atmosphere of the heroic. Legend and miracle have been busy with them, clothing them with superhuman powers, and ascribing extraordinary achievements to them. Stained-glass windows depict them as most unusual-looking people, the like of whom we have never met in real life. They wear quite impossible and most uncomfortable clothes; their heads are adorned with haloes and crowns, and in their hands they carry gigantic keys, swords, and such-like symbols: sometimes they are even seen clasping whole churches in their arms! And then those popular hymns, based on a reckless and profoundly ignorant acceptance of the fantastic imagery of the Book of Revelation as literal fact, describe them to us as performing prodigies of valour and endurance; until we have come to think of them as a race of men and women far removed from us, lifted high above the prosaic humdrum course of

our very ordinary, uneventful, and unheroic lives.

Sainthood looks very far away, utterly beyond the reach of "the likes of us." The truth is that Christianity has suffered heavily from "development," and in the course of twenty centuries has travelled far from its original homely simplicity. You will see what is meant if, e.g., you will for a moment visualise first Jesus of Nazareth, wandering about Galilee in His simple peasant dress, and then the gorgeous ceremonial of Pontifical High Mass at St. Peter's, Rome. The latter has grown out of the former by successive steps of gradual development, but what miles apart they are! And so with the idea of what makes a Saint. It has assumed strange and astonishing shapes, very far removed from its simple and homely beginnings, and has ended in the atmosphere of the heroic and supernatural. For in the New Testament a Saint means nothing more than an ordinary every-day Christian; a humble believer in and follower of Jesus the Lord, and not by any means always a very perfect one at that. There was nothing particularly heroic, far less super-natural, about the people whom St. Paul habitually addresses as "the Saints," which are at Corinth, or Philippi, or Ephesus, or somewhere.

And so we are glad of All Saints' Day because it brings our minds back to the real truth. For on that day of hallowed memories and tender retrospect, as we kneel in remembrance of those whom we have known and loved and lost awhile, how little, as a mater of fact, do our minds dwell on the gilded Saints of legend and stained-glass window. Not of these do we think on All Saints' Day, but rather of a great multitude of simple, homely, inconspicuous folk, quite undistinguished and totally unheroic, but for whose good example we humbly thank God and pray that we may be like them in their simple virtues.

How many of these we think of as numbered amongst the Saints; and our instinctive, unconscious, human judgment judges rightly. We know so well in our own minds what *we* mean by "a Saint." When we say that so-and-so is "just a real saint," we are thinking of someone who will do anything for you; who is

always saying "Let me do it," and never seems to be too tired to undertake one job more; someone who keeps a smiling face and is cheery when everyone else is depressed; someone who, when things go wrong and tempers get frayed, just goes quietly on, unruffled, patient, good-tempered; someone who is always sympathetic, large-hearted; always sees the best in everyone and is never known to say an unkind word of anyone; someone who habitually takes a back seat, hates to be thanked, and whose left hand never knows what his right hand is doing.

And nearly always you will find that he has got someone in tow—a lame dog being helped over a stile; a lad or a girl who is in danger of going wrong, a bedridden invalid, or some lonely and friendless person who is being visited, looked after, cheered up, and helped. Oh, we know the type. He or she is "just a saint." You will find them everywhere, more often than not in your own home. There can be but few of us who do not number some such amongst our acquaintances. How much we owe to them; how infinitely poorer the world would be without their presence, sweetening human life and making the wheels go round. They are not perfect, and if you told them that they were Saints they would be horrified at the idea; but that is just what they are.

If you stop to ask yourself what it is that makes them so entirely lovable, you will find that the answer is that there is something about them which reminds you irresistibly of Jesus Christ. They have caught the reflection of His character. They are not, of course, aware of it, and it is this very unawareness which gives them all their charm; for a goodness which is unconscious is of the very essence of Sainthood.

> "Glad hearts! without reproach or blot,
> They do Thy will and know it not."

With such Saints, in the true sense of the word, why should not we too be numbered; numbered amongst those for whose daily lives our friends will secretly thank God?

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